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## REVELATIONS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY ON VISUAL ARTISTIC EMERGENCE COMMON TRIGGERS, SHARED PERCEPTIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR PERPETUATION

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REVELATIONS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY ON VISUAL ARTISTIC EMERGENCE  
COMMON TRIGGERS, SHARED PERCEPTIONS  
AND STRATEGIES FOR PERPETUATION

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A Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership  
in the  
Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
at  
Western Connecticut State University  
2009

REVELATIONS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY ON VISUAL ARTISTIC EMERGENCE  
COMMON TRIGGERS, SHARED PERCEPTIONS  
AND STRATEGIES FOR PERPETUATION

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ABSTRACT

This research proposal identifies those experiences that lead to the pursuit of visual art as sustained passion in life. In seeking the potential factors that contribute to an individual's continued interest in visual art at key points in their physical maturity and educational lives, strategies for success could be developed for the benefit of those so disposed. This inquiry utilizes a qualitative methodology involving up to three consenting Advanced Placement high school seniors. Both male and female students over 18 years of age have the cognizance to think and guide creative action appropriately and recall past experience. Three carefully selected undergraduate and Master of Fine Arts (MFA) students of both genders have offered their perspectives and responses at an adult level. These students contributed information about visual artist emergence. In addition, perspectives relating to the perpetuation of on-going involvement within the field of visual art have been explored. Observations of the students within their creative environments and semi-structured interviews have drawn out reflections and life experiences that enabled proficiency within the wide variety of visual media at their disposal. The interviews have, in part, focused on selected pieces of artwork that hold personal meaning to each individual. Information accumulated from descriptive, structure, and contrast questions, has developed thick description, which has been coded and analyzed for commonly shared, as well as unique themes and experiences.

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2009

APPROVAL PAGE



*School of Professional Studies  
Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership*

Doctor of Education Dissertation

Revelations: A Qualitative Inquiry on  
Visual Artistic Emergence,  
Common Triggers, Shared Perceptions and Strategies for Perpetuation

Presented by

Steven John Kobylenski, Ed.D.

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Margaret Grimes

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## DEDICATION

Dedicated to my wife, Patricia Zuccarelli, without whose constant love, patience and reassurance, this dissertation would not have been possible.



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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE TOPIC**

The purpose of this study was to explore the contributing factors that might open the door to a life enriched by visual art. This study was undertaken to shed new light on the factors that promote artistic awareness in adolescents and that perpetuate this awareness in adults. Collective life circumstances that act to direct these individuals away from music, dance, or theater may or may not be triggered by similar experiences or shared perceptions.

This study addressed issues regarding experiences related to personal choices that focused interest in visual art by conducting semi-structured interviews with a group of 10 student informants over the age of 18 years old. Informants in this study, selected with the help of their instructors, are deeply involved in Advanced Placement (AP) courses at the high school, undergraduate college, and Master of Fine Arts (MFA) levels. The research focused on their recollection of how their interests the arts were awakened and when the desire emerged and grew. Responses from individual reflections have been analyzed and woven into a rich tapestry of data that contains possible attributes and triggers that all who are deeply involved in visual arts might possibly share, even including those who are unsure they have the gift.

As theory was developed during this research, the case-studies have revealed strategies for prolonging an active interest among this study's selected group of individuals with the potential for adaptation within an educational framework. By taking a closer look at methods used by those who have found success and fulfillment in the field of visual art, new ways may be found to enable others toward personal fulfillment through the arts.

### **Statement of Problem**

In choosing the context for this inquiry, very few studies were found that dealt with the topic of visual artistic emergence. This qualitative study addresses issues that relate to an individual's emergence as a visual artist from a standpoint outside of the research that has been done along developmental and cognitive lines. It explores triggering events which contribute to this emergence, and situational experiences that are likely to be commonly perceived by individuals who have chosen to pursue a visually artistic path. The factors that help in perpetuating an active interest have also been examined.

### **Significance of the Study**

The identification of triggers that lead to artistic emergence is worth serious inquiry; findings may have curricular implications. Though individuals may experience the same trigger and perceive it in their own way, the potentially common nature that these experiences possess might translate to beneficial options for classroom use. These triggers may have implications for curriculum development by being worked into programs for a broader population of students to discover. By exploring the points where individuals within a group of visual artists become developed enough in their awareness to pursue this passion, programs to address such an interest could have an impact on more effectively propelling students into the field of visual art. The research presented in this inquiry knits together the missing link of artistic emergence with the field of education, and can offer an important source for future research.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

1. *Visual Art* refers to artwork “such as painting, photography, or sculpture that appeals primarily to the visual sense and typically exists in permanent form, or

any of the art forms used to create such art” (*American Heritage Dictionary*). This inquiry will focus on artists performing in this realm at consistently proficient levels.

2. *Experience*, in a philosophical sense, refers to “the totality of the cognitions given by perception, encompassing all that is perceived, understood and remembered” (*Dictionary.com Unabridged*). Within the scope of this study, the cumulative effect of individual visual artistic experience will be explored.
3. *Revelation* is defined in this study as the disclosure of the collective experiences that have led to the realization that the informants in this inquiry are visual artists.
4. *Triggers* refer to specific personal encounters that initiate a binding interest to visual art. This inquiry will seek both common and singular triggers experienced among group members.
5. *Perception* is “the recognition and interpretation of sensory experiences held within the memory” (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*) of those within this study. The knowledge base that was woven through this perception may or may not be shared by those included in this study.
6. *Perpetuation* refers to the process of prolonging an active interest in the visual arts. In this study, specific strategies used by group members may determine a means to utilize these conditions for enhanced curriculum planning.
7. *Informants* within this research are members of the purposive sample, interviewed for information they have collected through life experience (Spradley, 1979). Informants have also been referred to as respondents and contributors in this inquiry.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The nature of recollection and discourse carries with it inherent flaws. Informants may develop personal realities that are somewhat altered as they are replayed in their minds and subsequently told to others. This study attempts to neutralize the issue by using multiple constructed realities that have been brought out by questions asked of each individual. Also, because of the immersion this researcher has had within the field of visual art for the past 35 to 40 years, there is a degree of bias associated with personal feelings for informants who have also chosen artistic involvement. The questioning strategies were designed to limit this researcher's personal distortions and

### **Related Literature**

There is scant research specifically focused on the field of artistic emergence. Studies undertaken by Viktor Lowenfeld (1949, 1987) from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century until his death, and by theorists Howard Gardner (1980, 1982, 1984, and 1994) and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1969, 1982, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997, and 2001) since the 1960s to the present, have uncovered characteristics that establish important milestones in the lives of children. Their findings are more closely related to cognitive and developmental growth. Lowenfeld's (1949, 1987) research has been considered by many art instructors as an important contribution to education that parallels Piaget's stages of cognitive development. The work, based on visually artistic levels of acquisition, has been cited by Gardner (1980, 1982) in his research and has increased awareness in areas of artistic development. Csikszentmihalyi (2001) has contributed another facet dealing with experiential quality, adding greatly to what we know about the reasons for the continuation of interest in creative exploration. Most recently, Sir Richard Robinson's (1995, 2006, 2008) input into creative fields of imagination and visual

art while working in both public and educational settings has provided a fresh perspective on education and learning in an uncertain future.

### **Viktor Lowenfeld**

Viktor Lowenfeld's (1949, 1987) stages of artistic development offer the most pertinent point of view regarding this inquiry on artistic emergence, while closely paralleling corresponding stages evident in the work of Piaget. Refer to Appendix H for an alignment of both theories. Cognitive progression related to Piaget's studies is dependent upon the accumulated information and experiential stimuli which pave the way toward mature thinking.

Lowenfeld's research shows a parallel to Piaget's work; artistic counterparts to Late Concrete and Formal Operations stages are found in Lowenfeld's Gang Stage and Pseudo-Naturalistic stages (1987, pp. 306-431), an underlying foundation for this study. The stages are relevant here because they begin to manifest themselves at the transition between childhood and adolescence. This is a point where an enhanced ability to perform deeper mental action related to artistic problem solving and the creation of mature art begins to emerge.

Lowenfeld's (1987) research has illuminated the intricacies of preadolescent attainment of artistic and aesthetic skills, and the perpetuation of these skills through an increasingly concentrated focus. A gap in the process of visual artistic realization begins at the adolescent level of development, where the skills needed to physically create artwork lag behind the ability to comprehend them. This ability to work toward a mastery of technique, a process by which expertise is accomplished in small increments, is critical for artistic

emergence to occur. Experience that contributes to overcoming creative obstacles forms the basis for triggers that might lead to an increased interest in visual art.

The research into the richness of artistic experiences was brought to light by John Dewey, who stated in the foreword in *The Unfolding of Artistic Activity* (Schaefer-Simmern, 1948) that “the world we have experienced becomes an integral part of the self that acts and is acted upon in further experience”. Experience that passes physically changes the individual because of it. Within past research, little data has been found that are concerned with the experiential triggers that might be common to mature visual artists leading to self-perpetuating artistic behavior.

### **Howard Gardner’s Theories on Artistic Development**

Research conducted by Howard Gardner (1982) has detailed how selective, quality experience in children profoundly influences an individual and the stimuli associated with working continually as an artist. Picasso, for example, found inspiration to explore stylistic change through contact with the artwork of other cultures that personally excited him allowing him to continue along his creative path (Bornstein, 1982). His life-long stylistic dance was perpetuated by a continual search for new and exciting forms of art that would open a fresh channel for his own work. The period of artistic exploration stretching from adolescence into adulthood may hold opportunities that might benefit individuals in their attainment of artistic emergence. They have yet to be detailed to any extent.

In a seminal study focusing on a variety of backgrounds and cultures, Henry Schaefer-Simmern (1948) found that an individual’s progress, when coupled with meaningful experience, leads to perceptual growth. His focus on children’s work shows that no matter at what age drawing commences, the child builds upon what is perceived as

aesthetically pleasing. Based on this premise, Howard Gardner (1980) found that the exploration of repetition, experimentation with line and shape, and positively reinforced creativity sets the stage for later artistic production. An internal equilibrium between organization and cognition occurs between the ages of five and seven. Gardner (1980) acknowledged that any failure to produce a work with undesirable results becomes increasingly detrimental **to** an artistic future. There comes a point at which where cognition in preadolescence advanced beyond the limits of an individual's ability to render effective images. It is at this juncture that shifting interest toward other satisfactory ends in other fields plays a pivotal factor in turning away from visual art.

### **Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's Perspective of Positive Experiences Related to Art**

It has been determined that adolescence becomes a period when children reach a more mature level of cognizance. They have amassed a collective body of experience, and they are better equipped to choose a path of interest. Studies conducted by Csikszentmihalyi (1991) have revealed that when happiness at tasks leads to what he has described as "optimal" or "flow" experiences, this choice becomes easier for individuals to follow. Csikszentmihalyi (1991) believes that eight potential components act together to create flow experiences. These experiences most often occur when an assignment or personal project has a good chance of being completed, and when an individual has the crucial ability to concentrate on the task. The task generating the experience must have clear goals and a potential for some type of immediate feedback. The person can confront the task with little or no conscious effort, possibly due to higher skill levels. He or she often becomes involved to a point of losing concern for what is occurring within the immediate environment. There is a degree of control that the individual maintains while self-awareness is diminished, and

perception of the passage of time is altered to the point that he or she is unaware that, occasionally, many hours have passed. Subsequently, the self emerges stronger after the experience has been fulfilled. A period of self-reflection allows a chance to assess what has been created.

In fact, visual art activities have the potential to contain many characteristics of flow experiences; that students are unaware of the passage of time while they create is one such indicator that an optimal experience has taken place. In this study, informants who have been asked to reflect on their flow experiences mention at least one of the optimal components within their recollection. Because the experience provided both a challenge and a successful outcome, those who have had a flow experience often try to generate others. Each one builds upon previous episodes, and effectively generates self-perpetuating activity in visual art production.

### **Sir Ken Robinson's Description of the Educational System**

Sir Ken Robinson (1996) has emerged as a voice promoting the redefinition of education after careers in both the teaching and business professions. The system of educating students solely for the jobs they may hold in the future is problematic, considering the rapidly changing world we are living in. Artistic emergence has the potential to enable creative thinkers to generate change. Robinson's (2006) premise is that for society to be successful in the near future, a major paradigm shift must take place from traditional educational structure to something completely new. Educational systems and both public and corporate institutions are all interdependent on one another.

The research conducted by Robinson (2008) has shown that current educational systems in the United States and elsewhere around the world are based on 19<sup>th</sup>-century



models and were initially developed in response to industrial economies that have become hopelessly antiquated in our world. The educational environment within art rooms and those of traditional educational settings in core subjects are remarkably different. Art rooms can provide a model that can benefit education. The less rigid, more open atmosphere found in art rooms can promote deeper interest and creative thinking if it can be incorporated into other learning environments.

Robinson (2008) states that there is also a breakdown in the connections between the higher and lower levels in education. The world really requires more creative thinkers to move society towards positive change. Artistic emergence is an important milestone that enriches the life of an individual; artistic and creative thinking can be applied to a number of career choices.

## **Methods and Procedures**

### **Questions Directing This Inquiry**

1. What triggers artistic emergence?
2. When does artistic emergence generally occur?
3. What are the relationships between school experience and artistic emergence?
4. What considerations must be present for the perpetuation of this interest?

### **Informants**

The sample of this inquiry relies on the contribution of data by *informants* (Spradley, 1979) that have been drawn from a purposive sample including high school seniors and Bachelor and Master's level college students. They are motivated and committed to studying

visual art; characteristics which become evident upon observation of their past performance and creative drive. Informants were selected for this study with the help of their instructors and professors who are familiar with their creative traits.

All participants within this study are 18 years of age or older, though provisions for seeking parental permission for high school informants were put into place. Informants were all located in southwestern Connecticut when interviewed, and the sample contained a diverse cultural and socio-economic mix.

Four informants were selected from a population of high school seniors and were enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. AP course selection follows exacting criteria. A rigorous production of artwork and the development of an exemplary portfolio is the goal. With the assistance of trained high school visual arts faculty mentors, students actively create and select individual pieces of artwork that are then categorized into three sections for assessment: quality, concentration, and breadth. The successful completion of a passing portfolio enables the student to start at a higher level of undergraduate studies. AP students provided important data from the childhood triggers precipitating an initial interest in visual art.

Two undergraduate students chosen for this study were actively involved in Fine Arts programs in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Master of Fine Arts informants were first- and second-year students in visual art programs in the Connecticut State University system. Upper level informants had made the choice to acquire advanced study and terminal degrees in the field of visual art and have possible long term plans concerning a future in the field of visual art, attesting to their commitment to visual artistic emergence. The information contributed by this level was related to a point at which visual artistic emergence was most

likely to unfold. A total of 10 informants was selected, sufficient to achieve the trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) required for the qualitative aspect of this research. Professors and instructors involved on a daily basis with the informants assisted in nomination by providing information and feedback after receiving general selection criteria from this researcher.

Initial contact with each informant has created a trusting environment by offering an explanation of the study and aspects of its confidentiality and details. Each informant has been observed while operating in personal creative environments, including classrooms or studios. Observations and interviews were scheduled for one to two hours, with repeated encounters scheduled at the informants' convenience to establish thick description. Pieces of artwork were discussed during these meetings, with the informant providing information about his or her personal importance. Data compiled from ethnographic, semi-structured interviews, and thick description in a case study format have both chronicled and offered a rendering of the direction taken by each informant.

An adequate representation achieved through multiple constructed representations and a thorough description of context and settings have detailed how each informant became involved in visual art. In this approach, hypotheses were allowed to emerge without the reliance of a strictly prescribed path. Each of the contributors was observed and interviewed utilizing carefully formulated questioning strategies based on Spradley's (1979) method of ethnographic interviewing.

Questions were grouped into descriptive, structural and contrast categories. Answers to descriptive questions have given the researcher a broad view of the informant's overall perceptions relating to visual art. The analysis of the responses has created a body of

information that can be further probed, utilizing structural and contrast questions. The questions allowed the interviewer to funnel information by verifying domain specific, terminology, and semantic relationships developed from the domain analysis. Further analysis and questioning have allowed the researcher to uncover common triggers and shared experiences. Possible strategies for sustained experiences have also begun to emerge from the body of information.

### **Research Design**

Naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were the design methods through which this research was conducted. Naturalistic inquiry relies on systematically gathered descriptive information from an informant while the researcher is embedded within the environment of the informant. The prolonged engagement by the researcher within an artistic field formed the basis for gathering richly descriptive data constructed within the informants' lives. A concrete "positivist" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) paradigm that follows a strictly empirical path is contrary to that of naturalistic inquiry as an *a priori* hypothesis was tested; therefore, an uncovering of theory grounded in informant responses was analyzed and used to drive the research. Hypotheses do not drive investigation; they emerge as information was discovered through informants' responses, the researcher's observation of the informants, and the researcher's personal involvement in the inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Within the naturalistic paradigm, reality is not a linear singularity in scope; each individual possesses unique realities constructed from personal and collective experiences, multiple perspectives, and multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher and informant interact to draw out and bring into being the reasons why visual art became an

important part of life. This blurs the line between cause and effect. Within the naturalistic paradigm, generalizability is expressed through a focus on individual cases, each subject to change as data emerge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Naturalistic inquiry is value-bound by the inquiring researcher's selection of the problem, paradigm, substantive theory guiding the collection of information, and the study context. These facets must come together in congruence. Their values' resonance acts to reinforce the positive results delineating issues of visual artistic emergence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Because of the nature of this study, naturalistic inquiry was selected to gather the data needed to open the lens on artistic emergence. Observations and interviews have taken place in the studios and classrooms where members of the group are most comfortable. The researcher has effectively become a human instrument with the ability to reason and evaluate the richness of informant responses, working to tease out intricate details. The researcher's passion for seeking the reasons surrounding artistic emergence has allowed for a more accurate reading of informant posturing and discourse. Each case study has been based on its own particularities because of the individuals being included in the study, eliminating the consistency sought within empirical studies.

This study relies on the concept of trustworthiness, an alternate equivalent to internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. The principle of trustworthiness is based upon four characteristics acting as appropriate measures within naturalistic research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility assumes the role of internal validity and is established through careful reconstruction of realities along with the approval of the original stakeholders the information was obtained from, the visual artists themselves. Three interconnected activities establish and fortify credibility with this inquiry: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and member checking. Acting together, these controls will effectively delimit the inherent issues within qualitative research.

Prolonged engagement has given the researcher the ability to assess distortions that might influence the scope of the data. It also allows the inquirer to develop and establish trust to offset these threats. These may include personal values or preconceived ideas about what will most likely be anticipated on the part of the inquirer throughout the interviewing process. Misinformation in recollecting events and reconstructing the past on the part of the informant can occur unintentionally (perceptual distortion, selective perception, retrospective distortion), or be intentionally misleading.

Persistent observation opens the researcher to the flow of how the informants operate while involved in visual art activities. Through persistent observation, a deeper understanding is developed, and seemingly unimportant factors can change in meaning. Conversely, initially important observations may not be as critical as the study progresses, and the researcher will adjust questioning strategies to gain more pertinent information.

Informal member checking offers a means for stronger credibility within this study. This enables each informant in the study to validate the accuracy of his or her individual reconstructions. Informants have had the opportunity to provide additional information and clarify misunderstandings about personal experiences which arose during data collection. Triangulation is the verification of information exposed in the interview responses offered by

the informants as they recall facets of their artistic emergence. This verification uses information from other data sources such as observations, research logs and member checks to build the thick descriptions which lead to the stronger credibility of the study.

Transferability takes the place of external reliability within naturalistic research. The depth of proper thick description can only provide a means for the transferability of a study of visual artistic emergence to be pursued, due to the nature of the paradigm. A purposive sample of committed artists was established to understand common factors which lead each informant to artistic emergence. This focus allows an opportunity for further study for researchers wishing to explore more empirical studies.

Dependability regarding this study has been accounted for through the use of an inquiry audit. As the inquiry progressed, continual examination of methods and processes were used. Member checking, informant verification and agreement with transcriptions of the interviews, confirmed that the study met with consistent consensus. Informants were able to clarify responses and add information they felt was needed as the inquiry unfolded.

Confirmability is evident within the triangulation of collected data, journal entries, and research logs. Components were subject to individual assessment by informants for credibility consistently through member checks.

### **Method for Analysis**

The nature of this study does not rely on a predetermined hypothesis. Inductive analyses of reconstructions were dependent on discovering constructs that emerged from the inquiry to generate theory. With consistent informant verification, the researcher subjectively assessed and categorized data from these interviews. All transcriptions, observational notes, descriptions related to artwork, reflexive journals, and research logs have been used to

generate 65 primary code categories. These initial categories have been grouped in various ways and finally collapsed into five axial codes related to specific triggers leading to artistic emergence in the informants' lives. The response coding has been done using a software package to assist with data coding and retrieval. A description of the research timeline follows:

1. May 2007: Preliminary Phase-Initial contact with administrators and instructors, cover letter describing study and its importance, selection forms, student and parental permission forms
2. October 2007: Phase I- Initiation and engagement with informants/orientation and overview, semi-structured interviews
3. December 2007: Phase II- Revisit/focused exploration, structured interviews member checking
4. Winter 2008: Phase III- Writing, confirmation and analysis, member checking
5. Spring 2009: Written completion of Dissertation.



## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This chapter examines previous inquiry and research regarding the combination of factors that converge as an individual develops and emerges as a visual artist. In addition to examining these collective experiences, this study also focuses on the time at which artistic emergence occurs. This can be either as a revelation or as a transformational emergence as a visual artist. Both good and bad experiences have an effect on an individual as he or she synthesizes and builds on his or her respective knowledge bases. Another key point to this inquiry is the role the educational environment plays in supporting and directing a student towards artistic emergence. The interaction between the student and peers within the class often act as a supporting mechanism for exploration. Instructors who offer guidance help to create a comfortable environment in which the student can learn from mistakes and seek successful solutions to artistic problems.

The chapter is organized according to research related to this study that is found in texts concerned with cognitive, social, and artistic development related to pertinent theorists. Each of these sections is followed by information found in journals, reports, and other scholarly publications relevant to the topic of artistic emergence. The chapter finishes by summarizing and relating topics to the research questions generating this inquiry.

Artistic emergence is defined within this inquiry as the descriptive history of a sample of visual artists sharing common perceptions that may have triggered a personal choice to pursue visual art as a continued passion. It was the assumption of this inquiry that artistic emergence occurred around early adolescence, at the juncture of middle school and high school. It was assumed that this could be a tipping point at which conscious decision-making concerning an artistic future might be realized in those who have both an interest and a skill

set defining them as potential as artists. This was precisely the point at which the researcher presenting this inquiry realized his future as a visual artist.

Artistic emergence appears most frequently as a branch on the developmental psychology tree, yet it never really appears as a topic of particular focus for educational or curricular purposes on its own. Therefore, this inquiry has relied on some older, yet important, research as a starting point. This study has also included both current journal articles and recent research to provide a more contemporary direction leading to artistic emergence. This chapter presents theoretical research on artistic emergence that closely parallels physical and cognitive development in places.

### **Viktor Lowenfeld's Stages of Artistic Emergence**

In considering a time frame for stages of artistic emergence to occur, a brief review of the theory of cognitive development established by Jean Piaget (1936) is an appropriate starting point. These developmental stages have a parallel in the artistic stages of Viktor Lowenfeld (1949, 1987), although Lowenfeld's stages are more closely related to the construct of artistic emergence.

Piaget's developmental stages represent progressive ways in which children typically deal with acquiring and processing information. Unless certain goals are achieved, some avenues of learning cannot be opened until a child has accumulated enough experience to move apprehensively forward into the following stage. For the purposes of this study, Piaget's (1936) Late Concrete and Formal Operational stages are of importance, because of the age at which they begin to manifest themselves in a developing student. These stages roughly correspond to the onset of adolescence and increased cognitive awareness. As the levels unfold, students are able to make sensible judgments about observable occurrences and

there is an expanded capacity for considering numerous possibilities and outcomes. At the Formal Operational stage, a student can begin to recognize and utilize his or her awareness to see things from multiple perspectives and to perform mental actions on both a symbolic and a physical level.

Lowenfeld's (1949, 1987) stages of artistic development offer a more pertinent viewpoint with regard to this inquiry on artistic emergence. There is a notable parallel in the fact that each stage of artistic development has a loosely corresponding stage evident in the work of Piaget. Cognitive progression related to Piaget's studies is dependent upon the accumulated information and experiential stimuli that pave the way toward the next level. Lowenfeld's (1987) stages of artistic development are not met with an abrupt ending and beginning, but represent approximate midpoints in the course of development. Each stage follows the other to provide a continuum of artistic development. The stages always follow in sequence, but each stage can be enhanced and enriched through artistic experiences. Parents and educators should be critically aware of this critical issue in order to aid in that development (Lowenfeld, p. 48).

Along with artistic development on a continuum based on previous experience, Lowenfeld states that art can be a means to further understand holistic growth (p. 59-70). Included within the scope of this understanding are emotional, intellectual, physical, perceptual, social, aesthetic, and creative growths. Artistically, younger children often repeat imagery, depicting variety within that image. For example, a tree may be represented in a variety of ways, yet each image still depicts a tree. Personalization, the drawing of "my tree," may indicate individuals who have, by their focused involvement, shown a degree of emotional growth.

Intellectual growth may manifest itself in the visual artwork of students in their use of details and environmental awareness when developing and creating artwork. Of particular importance to this study is the fact that the most detail-oriented work should occur at the beginning of adolescence, approximately corresponding to the transition from middle to high school. Limited artistic use of details may signify a delay of intellectual and creative growth, though there may be an issue of lack of involvement due to subject matter or other restrictions. The creation of artwork offers an avenue for students to stimulate intellectual growth if the experiences surrounding the creative endeavors are inherently positive.

Physical growth becomes evident in artwork by the tighter control exhibited as a result of enhanced motor control while children progress along the path of development. Lowenfeld (1987) offers the concept that “the physically active child will portray active physical motions and will develop a greater sensitivity to physical achievement” (p. 63).

In Lowenfeld’s (1987) opinion, perceptual growth is “of vital importance, for the enjoyment of life and the ability to learn may depend on the meaning and quality of sensory experiences” (p. 63). Observational skills in art directly affect sensitivity to the basic elements, such as color, form and space, which in turn grow through frequent experiences revolving around the creation of work. Visual art can also offer tactile and kinesthetic avenues for perceptual growth.

Social growth is evident in student work as self-expression in creating artwork that offers a representation of ideas to others. The rendering of what is important to the child can be an indicator of social awareness through visual art. Working cooperatively on artwork can develop a greater awareness of how an individual contribution can affect a larger group.

Aesthetic growth relies upon aesthetic criteria based “on the individual, the particular work of art, the culture it is being produced in and the intent or purpose behind the art form” (Lowenfeld, 1987, p. 67). Regarding this study, the ability of adolescents to possibly enjoy the act of considerate creativity offers an opportunity for potentially positive experiences along creative pathways.

In Lowenfeld’s (1987) opinion, creative growth lies within every child. It develops from the earliest mark-making experiences of early childhood through the increasingly intense desire to create realistic images at the adolescent level. Lowenfeld (1987) states clearly that this creativity is highly individual, a point which must be clear to both parents and educators when providing artistic experiences to perpetuate motivation and desire.

As artistic counterparts to Piaget’s (1936) Late Concrete and Formal Operations stages, Lowenfeld’s (1987) Gang and Pseudo-Naturalistic stages are of primary importance for establishing an underlying foundation for this study. These stages are relevant to this study because they occur at the point in a child’s life when an enhanced ability to perform deeper mental action related to artistic problem solving begins to evolve. The creation of substantial, more mature art begins to emerge as a result. The students at this developmental level (approximately 11-14 years in age) approach a pivotal point at which they would be able to grasp more complex skills. Lowenfeld (1987) characterizes the Pseudo-Naturalistic Stage as being critically important in visual artistic development because the meaning of spatial awareness as well as the concepts of elements and principles of design take on greater importance in artwork. The desire to record realistic renderings becomes more important at this stage of artistic development.

Far from the somewhat negative connotation of the title Gang, this stage can be considered as an important starting point to this study on artistic emergence because it represents the period at which group cooperation, self-concept, and social independence begin to emerge as social constructs for most individuals. There is a growing awareness of the real world, in which the importance of friends and of emotional relationships starts to create the memories that have the potential to enrich experience. The creation of art gains new importance with some individuals who see it as a means to render surroundings or express feelings because of an increasing level of self-awareness. Since secondary school students spend the better part of the day with others of the same age range, peer influence plays an important part on the self-identity of an individual.

Lowenfeld (1987) states that around the age of 12, individuals begin to coalesce into two types of groups, creating work that exhibits strength in either visual or haptic expression. The term haptic refers to a more subjective feeling, the polar opposite of visual, more concrete representation. This is not to say that the boundary between haptic and visual perception cannot be blurred; most visual artists fall somewhere in between, often fluctuating between the two. In measuring these qualities, Lowenfeld (1945, 1966) found that out of a sample of 1,128 subjects, 47 percent had distinct visual tendencies, while 23 percent were scored as haptic. The remaining 30 percent fell in the area between the two. Half of the sample could be regarded as more visual while less than one quarter of the sample was regarded as haptic (p. 357).

Unfortunately, this divergence also signals the disappearance of the spontaneous creation often associated with younger children, and a purely creative process becomes tainted. It is the point at which students begin to grow increasingly critical of their own

artistic products because of an expanded self-awareness, a fact that is noted by Gardner (1982) and other researchers, also. The production of art moves from “unconsciously drawing what is known to consciously relying upon what is seen” (Lowenfeld, 1987, p. 362). The focus on the completed artwork lies in visual appearance rather than in the artistic effort it took to create it along with the perception that the work will be judged by peers and instructors.

Most of Lowenfeld’s (1949, 1987) research seems to be relegated to text with little found in journals and other scholarly writing. Cited by many since his death in 1960, Lowenfeld’s contributions to the theory of art education have focused on the psychological help and wholeness the children gain from making art objects.

### **Howard Gardner’s Further Explorations of Artistic Development**

The research undertaken by psychologist Howard Gardner (1980, 1982, 1984, 1994) on artistic development and cognitive awareness shares some of the sequential aspects advanced by both Piaget (1936) and Lowenfeld (1949, 1987). Gardner (1980) proposed that general visual artistic development throughout childhood follows a U-shaped curve, a visual inversion of the famous bell curve. The curve begins at a high point of creativity evident in the very young and then sinks during the onset of adolescence because of a growing self-awareness and self-critical eye. The U-shaped curve was developed by Gardner (1980) after exposure to early research conducted by Schaefer-Simmern (1948). Schaefer-Simmern (1948) found that the “unrestrained, experimental stage in children is also presented in adults who have no constraints placed upon them, building aesthetic sensibility through selection and rejection” (p. 29). Gardner (1980) cites Schaefer-Simmern’s (1948) in *The Unfolding of Artistic Activity*, which detailed individuals who began transforming visual experience into a

representational artistic form at a point after adolescence. Schaefer-Simmern (1948) selected a sample that relied on individuals from various cultures and included institutionalized and “mentally deficient” subjects of low IQ, juvenile delinquents placed in detention centers, and business people; all individuals were unfamiliar with working in artistic fields. Schaefer-Simmern (1948) documented similarities in artistic growth that corresponded to that which was found in children as they developed through the stages previously discussed. His premise was that any type of artwork created by a wide range of subjects relied on the qualitative relationship of form. As the study progressed, the individuals built upon previous experience to add to their visual cognizance, despite their older ages. There inevitably developed a point at which the ability to observe and make attempts at artistic rendering was met with a lack of expertise to successfully create a realistic image. Gardner’s (1982) research had revealed that this occurred with adolescents at a critical point in their development.

Gardner (1994) also cited Rhonda Kellogg (*The Arts and Human Development*, p. 216) in bringing to light developmental advances in children that align with those noted by previously mentioned researchers in this study. Kellogg (1969) based her comments on a vast collection of artwork from a variety of cultures and found that mastery of schema begins to occur at the age of four. At this age, scribbles begin to coalesce into familiar shapes, and these are placed into increasingly elaborate compositions. The scope of Kellogg’s (1969) work and the research that has evolved from it have revealed a pan-cultural universality in the use of schema that precedes the representation of objects by children. Gardner (1982) also referred to the Piagetian framework when he proposed the increased use of referring to symbol systems with children between the ages of three to five years. The ability to refer to objects rather than to directly interact with them and an increased ability to combine



geometric shapes into recognizable figures are the mechanistic beginnings of artistic awareness.

Early childhood is a period of unconstrained and vibrantly free time in which art is created without critical reflection. The period between five and seven years of age is identified as a golden age for artistic development (Gardner, 1973, 1982). Children show a tendency for synesthetic translations across sensory systems, with a propensity for exploring symbolic components without concern for an end product. Between five and seven years of age, Gardner (1982) states, that creative work from children often contains an expressive use of artistic elements and principles, including color, line, rhythm, and pattern. Nearly all children who were immersed in a supportive environment, regardless of cultural background, exhibited a marked degree of creativity and inventiveness, according to Gardner (1982).

Throughout this researcher's instructional tenure at the elementary and intermediate levels, student artwork was often surprisingly charming because of a lack of artistic mastery or many years of formal guidance. Early work created by children often follows universal schema, including basic geometrical shapes and an innate sensitivity to the subtleties of linear properties, such as differences between straight and curved, short and long, and vertical or horizontal.

### **An Alignment Between Gardner and Lowenfeld**

Gardner states that an individual cannot leap ahead and yet maintain a balanced viewpoint in respect to his or her artistic development. The following period in childhood is marked by an increasing cultural awareness that slowly constrains this joyous abandon with rules of conduct forming a framework for experimentation. This is a literal period, during

which the desire to render with accuracy begins to manifest itself. A more positive aspect of this period is the growing ability on the part of a few to risk failure and return to the task at hand until a satisfying artistic result is reached. The artist creates work through the operation of selection and rejection, which process is filtered through an acquired sensitivity. Continued success lends stability to the process.

As children interested in visual art pass certain points along the path of grade-level development, a growing awareness in lack of skill development in the visual arts area causes some children to follow another, more enjoyable, path. As motor skills are enhanced, artwork becomes more deliberate, only to begin to falter as the child begins to perceive the work as becoming inferior. By the age of nine or 10, non-artistically motivated children will begin to cease worthwhile artistic production. As adolescence approaches, young artists may become increasingly fearful of failing to use accumulated skills to render images accurately or to acquire new skills which may eventually lead to stronger proficiency in visual art. This low point corresponds to the U-shaped curve's trough, designating a period of literalness that occurs during the struggle many young adolescents experience when attempting to recreate an image without the fully developed skills necessary to succeed. This low point relates to the span of time encompassing Lowenfeld's (1987) Mid to Late Gang Stage through the Pseudo-Naturalistic Stage (9 to 14 years of age) and is a factor of concern regarding artistic perpetuity. Gardner (1994) says that a regression occurs because of a "growing insecurity about the quality of one's own product" (p. 220) and makes assumptions that the onset of puberty exhausts attention or deflects it to other interests. Gardner (1994) adds, "Children tend to portray the realistic details seen in objects or to adopt popular schematic or usual pictorial methods of depicting them" (p. 220). The act of attempting realistic rendering

without proper guidance often results in the finding of positive experience in another direction.

For those who emerge from the depression of the curve, there awaits the potential for the establishment of artistic competence and success. The emergence from the depths of the trough represents the resurgence of fresh new perspectives that are attained on the part of those adolescents who have developed the ability to reflect and synthesize creative experience and artistic skill. An individual's reappearance from the depths of the U-shaped curve denotes the threshold of an advanced level of artistic formulation and potential mastery of proficiencies associated with visual artistic emergence.

Gardner (1994) offers insight into the factors that may predispose an advanced level in visual art production in some individuals or a move away from the field altogether for others. Gardner (1994) states that in some cases, the desire to continue to create is due to parental reinforcement and the feeling of competence derived from continued persistence in the act of creating (p. 258). Adolescent artists can present a desire to focus on creating work along a certain theme or artist with whom they identify. They may also change direction abruptly to pursue another path to self-identity without proper support. Current researchers have added to the base established through Gardner's (1994) efforts. Recent studies show evidence that prefrontal growth during adolescence contributes to an increased sense of self-identity, with implications that can be linked to artistic emergence. Research on cognitive development by Hutterlocher, Rakic, Chugani and Giedds (as cited by Strauch, 2003) has shed new light on synaptic growth at the critical period from preadolescence through early adulthood. This span of time has recently been associated with unprecedented growth and the formation of new synaptic connections within the prefrontal cortex, an area responsible for

language capacity, social interaction, and cognitive function (Strauch, 2003). In fact, the only other period in a person's life that this level of synaptic growth occurs is in infancy, coinciding with the affect presented within stages proposed by Lowenfeld (1949, 1987) and Piaget (1936) discussed earlier in this inquiry.

Synaptic exuberance is a cycle of fresh and remarkable growth in the prefrontal cortex of the brain during adolescence. The phenomenon offers an optimum window of opportunity to learn both positive and negative traits that will remain with an individual for the rest of his or her life (Strauch, 2003, pp. 44-49). Millions of new connections are created, forming new pathways for the acquisition of knowledge. This has been suggested as reasons for adolescent behavior to take sudden shifts, turns, and swings. New interests, including visual art, can become lifelong interests as these connections are formed through sensitive guidance by parents and instructors. Synaptic connections that are not utilized eventually wither and are pared by the individual; these connections are reactivated only with difficulty as exuberance gradually begins to diminish, and the critical window of opportunity slowly draws to a close. By the time an individual has reached his or her mid-20s, acquiring new skills, including visual artistic ones, becomes more difficult.

### **Howard Gardner's Description of the Crystalizing Experience**

Gardner's research also touched upon the notion that, at certain points in the life of an individual, a defining moment of clarity occurs, and a directional change towards a chosen path is revealed. Gardner and Project Zero colleague Joseph Walters (1984) attempted to define and strengthen the concept of what they termed the Crystalizing Experience, a revelation in which the artist realizes that a specific path has become important and is the one which he or she must take. The concept was based on Gardner's (1984) theory of multiple

intelligences, in which he states that an individual is capable of seven types of intellectual accomplishments: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal accomplishments. Depending on a variety of factors in life, each person amasses strengths and weaknesses in Gardner's domains and becomes a unique being. The crystallizing experience "is an overt reaction of an individual to some quality or feature of a domain: the reaction yields an immediate, but also a long-term change in that individual's concept of that domain" (Gardner & Walters, 1984, p. 6). The report adds that the identification of the crystallizing experience can only be recounted retrospectively as the artist looks back on his or her chosen path in life.

### **The Crystallizing Event**

The crystallizing event apparently occurs at an unexpected point in the life of a fairly accomplished artist and is triggered by something that dramatically presented itself to the artist; experimentation with a certain media, a particular problem that needs to be solved, or an experience unrelated to the art form in which the individual was immersed. In their report, Gardner and Walters (1984) state that a crystallizing experience was distilled from the descriptions recalled by three famous individuals—the musician Debussy, the visual artist Renoir, and the mathematician Galois. Research was conducted by analyzing the personal writing, letters and journals produced by these individuals. It was determined that the purported crystallizing experience can occur either early in the life of an individual as an initial experience, as in Galois's revelation of mathematical proof, or as a refining experience, as in both Renoir's discovery and study of sculptor Jean Goujon's work, and Debussy's experience of Wagner's compositions. Each individual anecdote revealed that

while pondering seemingly unrelated phenomena, these individuals synthesized the experience in their respective fields to emerge on an advanced level of understanding.

These researchers interviewed a sample of artists in an attempt to determine if there was a transformational revelation whereby they experienced a crystallizing experience which afforded them insight along a particular pathway (1984, p. 28). The report goes on to describe the crystallizing experiences of a variety of individuals through interviews conducted to gain insight into the phenomenon, without conclusive evidence; some reported a crystallizing experience and some not. Perhaps due to a lack of concrete findings, the concept was eventually abandoned by Gardner (1984), who, by some accounts, would not address questions related to crystallizing experiences as time went by.

### **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Description of the Optimal Artistic Experience**

Rather than one defining experience that propels an individual toward a personal field of study, a series of experiences may better promote emergence as a successful artist. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1969, 1982, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001) has dedicated years of research into the process of how positive, deeply focused experiences affect the germination and growth of individual interests. These optimal experiences lead to a differentiation of the self, in which an individual benefits from each experience by enhancing the ability to become a better-rounded, less predictable, person. These episodes are perceived as enjoyable and are sought by individuals in a perpetuating cycle. Optimal experiences tend to exhibit what Csikszentmihalyi has termed Flow (1991), a construct that was presented in book form and read by the mainstream public. Of those interviewed on the subject of optimal experience, most reported in similar terms that this flow was “an almost effortless yet highly focused

state of consciousness” (*Special Report on Happiness*, p. 9). These descriptive accounts did not vary much according to culture, age or gender.

### **Components of Flow Experiences**

Csikszentmihalyi’s (1991) research stems from the fact that flow experiences are pleasurable to most individuals since they present something to be discovered. Throughout human development, genetic mutation has enabled some individuals to sense that the new discover works to stimulate brain centers that control pleasure. He goes on to state that as a counterbalancing affect, the other motivating force is that of entropy. Entropy balances the desire to discover by allowing an individual to seek out comfort through relaxation. Since most people tend to exhibit stronger entropic tendencies, the factor of enjoyment associated with novel discoveries is necessary for the advancement of societies. Csikszentmihalyi (1995) believes that as humankind progressed along the path of time, children who exhibited a natural curiosity, though more likely to court risks, were so appreciated for their approach to life that they were protected and given special privilege. Societies that nurtured these children and learned from their novel approaches to problem-solving were better prepared to advance (*Special Report on Happiness*, p. 9).

There are eight potential components that act together to create an optimal, or flow, experience. The experience most often occurs when the task is one that has a good chance of being completed. The ability to concentrate on the task is of critical importance. The task behind the experience has clear goals and offers immediate feedback. Perhaps because of developed skill levels, the individual can confront the task with little or no conscious effort, and becomes involved to a point of loss of concern for what is occurring within the immediate environment. There is a degree of control that the individual possesses while

involved. There is less concern for the self, which emerges stronger after the experience has been fulfilled. Finally, the sense of the passage of time is altered to the point that the individual is often unaware that many hours have elapsed. In fact, visual art activities in which individuals are unaware of the passage of time while they create provide an excellent indicator that an optimal experience has taken place. Individuals who have been asked to reflect on optimal experiences mention at least one of the components within their recollection. Because the experience provides both a challenge and a successful outcome, individuals who have had an optimal experience seek out others, each one building upon previous episodes, thus moving them towards higher levels of advancement.

Optimal experiences can be termed autotelic (Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, 1991, p. 83), a derivative of two Greek words, *auto*, meaning self, and *telos*, meaning goal. In these autotelic experiences, individuals pay close attention to the activity they are undertaking for its own merit. Well-rounded individuals who are neither self-conscious nor self-centered are more likely to have an ability to start a cycle of optimal experiences. Csikszentmihalyi (1991) cites the work of Kevin Rathunde's (1988) studies in which teenagers involved in certain types of relationships with parents appear to be significantly happier and stronger when dealing with life situations than peers who did not have comparable experiences.

*Family promotion of flow experiences.* Csikszentmihalyi (1997) offers six characteristics related to family situations which can promote optimal experiences. This is an important consideration for the purpose of this inquiry of artistic emergence. The first major characteristic is Clarity. Families who provided clear goals and expectations enabled feedback in which strengthened adolescents. The second is Centering. Adolescents'



perceptions that parents had an interest in what was happening in their children's lives appeared to be more emotionally centered for optimal experiences to occur. Adolescents who were offered choices, with options to possibly break parental rules along with associated appropriate consequences, defined the fourth characteristic of Trust. The trust that allows an adolescent a feeling of comfort of unselfconscious involvement in an interest fosters the fifth characteristic of Commitment. The final characteristic, Challenge, relates to parental dedication to provide sequentially complex activities that pull the adolescent along. Individuals who enjoyed the upbringing provided by family situations incorporating these characteristics were more likely to be able to be open to optimal experiences.

The development of the autotelic self enables individuals to perceive threatening experiences as more enjoyable challenges. They have an ability to set goals and use skills to produce results that offer the feedback necessary to create an optimal experience. They provide for themselves realistic expectations and act to adapt to feedback they observe within the context of the situation. The concentration and attention to detail allow for deeper involvement and enjoyment in the moment to moment unfolding of the experience. Optimal experiences and the connection between the flow and the happiness extracted from the act of creation are connected in a complex manner. Happiness comes only after the experience is completed, and can appear as a distraction while in a flow state. The flow producing experience must contain the complexities discussed above to propel the individual along the path of further pursuit.

#### *Csikszentmihalyi's Realization of Flow Experiences Related to Artistic Creation*

Early research by Csikszentmihalyi in collaboration with J.W. Getzels (1969) set the stage for Csikszentmihalyi's development in the flow construct. Though this research took

place nearly 40 years ago, the studies have relevance because they provide a base for the later construct of flow and a link with artistic emergence. The area of creative production had previously lacked important data related to two criteria, relative creativity of an artistic product and the observation of the creative event. Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels (1969) devised a series of studies to empirically determine the relationship between production and the attitudinal engagement of the artist involved in the production.

The basis for these studies sprang from research on artistic personality trait (Deignan, 1958; Cross, Cattell, & Butcher, 1967). However, the research focused on what determined the label of Artist rather than how the artist worked when in the act of creating.

Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels (1969), seeking to broaden the scope of available information, began by defining two components and then presented problem situations and discovered problem situations (Getzels, 1964; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1964, 1966a, 1966b, 1967). Presented problem situations are solved in a series of logical steps which lead to a correct outcome. Discovered problem situations require an individual to construct the problem before conceptualizing possible solutions. Upon arriving at a solution, there is a criterion by which to judge success, failure, or even the general correctness of the solution. The premise is one where those who approach creative problems with an open attitude may produce a more creative product than those who follow a tightly prescribed path towards a solution.

Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels (1969) developed an empirically testable situation in which a sample of 31 male art students in their junior and senior years at “one of the foremost art schools in the country” (1969, p. 94) were presented the task of creating and delivering an assessable product. It was to be critiqued by a group of five well-known artist-critics who would determine the degree of creativity inherent in the work. Members of the

sample were asked to provide data on their attitudes regarding the concern for discover while involve in the project.

The creative product consisted of a drawing developed from a still life which was set up by each individual. Twenty-seven objects typically found in studio collections and used for such purposes were at their disposal. No time constraints were imposed in the study; the artwork being considered was completed when it was determined to be pleasing to the individual. During subsequent interviews, a high percentage of the students in the sample indicated that the task related to normal studio procedure, effectively validating the study.

The assessment of the creative product by the panel of five artist-critics was based on three categories: craftsmanship or technical skill regardless of originality; originality or imaginativeness, regardless of craftsmanship; and the overall aesthetic value of the completed work. (*Concern for discovery: An attitudinal component of creative reproduction*, 1969, p. 96). The sole restriction imposed upon the judges was the use of a one- to nine-point scale with a prenormalized distribution.

Combined ratings for all drawings assessed by the panel of judges revealed a correlation between overall aesthetic value and originality of 90. The correlation between overall creativity and craftsmanship was 82. The correlation between originality and craftsmanship was 76. The agreement or reliability of the ratings was determined by intraclass correlation. The coefficient for overall aesthetic value was 29, with a reliability of sum coefficient of 67. For originality, the two coefficients were 31 and 69, respectively; for craftsmanship, 22 and 58, respectively.

After completion of the still-life drawings, each individual was interviewed, with the focus being placed on the subjective experience while in the act of creative production. The

interview also probed arrangement of objects, thoughts while composing the drawing, and reflections on changes and alterations to the arrangement. The questioning strategy was designed to generate data regarding the stages of problem formulation and attempts at solution through the process of drawing. It concluded with the reflective review of the solution attained by the artist. (*Concern for discovery: An attitudinal component of creative production*, 1969, p. 100) Formulating the problem: The artists who stated that they followed prescribed principles and a step-by-step arrangement and rendering of the assembled still life were rated low on concerns for discovery. Those in the sample who stated that the arrangement was not as significant and that the real structure of the artwork was to be worked out on the picture plane of the drawing as they worked were considered to be high on the concerns for discovery. A test for reliability of scoring by 2 raters gave a correlation of 85 ( $p < .005$ ). Are these quotes? Then check the length and also provide the page numbers.

1. Attempting solutions: Artists responding to questions related to discovery while attempting solutions who had stated that they were satisfied with an exact reproduction or rendering were rated low on the domain. Artists who reported an integration of other ideas and incorporated these new concepts while developing their drawings received a high rating in concerns for the discovery of solutions. The integration included taking into account the relationships between the objects during the set up and altering and adjusting compositional issues while working. The test for reliability of scoring between 2 raters produced a correlation of 74 ( $p < .005$ ).
2. Concerns for discovery after the solution of the problem: Individuals who reflected on the task who had stated that they believed that some of the elements

within the drawing could be altered without affecting the aesthetics or composition of the artwork had essentially discovered a solution, rather than working toward a predetermined end. Of the sample, 42% were found to fit into a favorable category, while 58% felt that altering the work would effectively destroy the character of the work.

The results of the study showed that those with a higher score in concerns for discovery had produced drawings that were rated higher in both originality and aesthetic value, but not necessarily in craftsmanship. Those who scored higher in attempting solutions produced drawings rated higher in originality and aesthetic value but not necessarily in craftsmanship. Artists who were able to envision a finished piece that was subject to revision and change again were rated higher in the same categories mentioned above.

The findings indicated that problem formulation regarding creative work is critical to the creative process, a point which was unsubstantiated prior to this study. The results also pointed out that an attitude for the concern of discovery at the problem formulation stage is highly related to the creativity and originality of the finished work. Two characteristics related to later research on flow experience emerged from this study; the artist must have progressed to a point of acquiring skills necessary to successfully complete the challenge which is presented, and have a desire to resolve problematic situations. Artists who are on the same level of training and oriented toward an attitude of concern of discovery will most likely produce more original works of art with a high aesthetic quality.

Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) work on the flow construct has led to further research both as an individual theorist and in collaboration with others. Undertaken after the construct of flow began to solidify, several studies have linked intrinsic motivation to flow experiences in

which artists' skill levels were matched to new challenges. Joel Hektner and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) examined how the variations in adolescent optimal experiences over 18 months related to behavioral and other affective changes and to what extent they promoted self-directed learning.

It is natural to presume that a student's interests and preferences play an important role in what activities he or she may find intrinsically motivating. One key factor of intrinsic motivation is interest, an interaction between student and an activity that stretches existing capabilities. This stretch must be in balance for the experience to be optimal, with individuals often reporting a merging of action and awareness leading to a sense of enjoyment, a characteristic of flow experience. Flow, however, is an unstable phenomenon. (A *Longitudinal Exploration of Flow and Intrinsic Motivation in Adolescents*, 1996) states Who states this? Replace all of these citations in text with the author's last name.

In order to maintain the enjoyment of flow, people must continually engage in new challenges to match their increasing skills, and they must perfect their skills to meet new challenges. The motivation to seek and sustain enjoyment in life leads people to become both open to new experiences and more focused on particular patterns of action: in short, it propels the processes of differentiation of new interests and integration of new learning'. (p. 8)

Hektner and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) determined that adolescents who developed a propensity for flow experiences would be more likely to spend time undertaking activities which enabled a recreation of flow experiences from their past.

The study relied on students in the sixth, eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades to provide information based on the use of preprogrammed wristwatches that were designed to

randomly alert the individual. This was the foundation of the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) in which sample members were required to respond to the signals and report activities on a self-report form (ESF). The study investigated adolescents who had experienced increases in flow over the previous two-year period and those who had not. Both open and closed questions on the ESF reports received from participants were coded by trained researchers. Beside the concern with optimal experience, five other variables were important to the study: mood, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, concentration and importance to future goals.

Participants in the three youngest cohorts completed one week of responses in both the first and second waves of the study. At least 15 ESM self-reports were needed for participants to be included in the final sample. In the first wave of data collection (authors? 1993), 74% of the ESM sample completed enough valid self-reports to gain inclusion into the study. A total of 62% of the second wave (authors? 1995) had completed valid self-reports, with a final sample (N=281) returning sufficient data in both wave of collection. Students included an average of 35 responses in the first wave and 29 responses in the second wave; total over the two-year span was 18,035 responses.

In previous studies, flow had nearly always been measured as a relationship between challenges and skills, and an association between the respondents' immediate activities. The relationship between challenge and skill thought to characterize flow experience is one of balance. Most positive experiences are associated with levels of challenge, and skill has proven to be highly balanced relative to an individual's average levels (Massimini & Carli, 1988). Two components appear to be essential in the relationship between flow, on one hand,

and challenge and skill, on the other: the balance of challenge and skill and the perceived intensity within the experience.

For Hektner and Csikszentmihalyis' (1996) study, the formulation that satisfies empirical criteria is the geometrical mean (square root of the product) of raw score challenge and skill data. The method of analysis provided a continuous flow measure proportional to both challenge and skill. It contains the same range of values because of the interactive nature of challenge and skill in this measure, with the numerical value between the two dependent on this balance. The discrepancy between challenge and skill measurably decreases flow value.

The measure of change in flow was established by subtracting an individual's mean flow raw score in 1993 from that of the mean flow raw score from 1995. The difference was then divided by the pooled standard deviation of the participants flow scores from both years. The result corresponds to effect size, allowing for comparison across studies. The magnitude of difference in standard deviation would be considered small (0.2), medium (0.5), or large (0.8).

Two groups (Increase Group and Decrease Group) were formed for the purpose of the study (*A Longitudinal Exploration of Flow and Intrinsic Motivation in Adolescents*, 1996 use the correct citation in text.), with particular interest being paid to adolescents who had experienced a meaningful increase in flow over the two-year period and those who had not. A change of at least one quarter of an individual's own pooled standard deviation would result in a meaningful amount. By restricting the Increase Group (N=56) to those individuals whose first wave flow scores were not in the lowest fifth in the distribution, Hektner and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) sought to ensure that any increases could not be explained through a



statistical regression towards the mean. The Decrease Group (N=47) was similarly limited to individuals whose first wave flow scores were not in the highest fifth of the distribution.

Both Increase and Decrease Groups began in 1993 with similar flow levels (Increase  $M = 4.29$ , Decrease  $M = 4.25$ ), diverging in 1995 (Increase  $M = 5.32$ , Decrease  $M = 3.32$ ,  $t = 13.1$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Other distinctions evident between the two groups could not, as determined by Hektner and Csikszentmihalyi (1996), be attributed to differences within initial flow levels. The adolescents in the two groups encountered a mean change in flow experience of .6 of a standard deviation, falling between a medium and large effect.

A third group (Stable High, N=34) was established for purposes of comparison, with individuals whose level of flow did not change and remained in the upper third of the distribution (1993 flow  $M = 5.46$ , 1995 flow  $M = 5.42$ , change  $M = .02$ ).

Group analysis was computed using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) in order to test for group differences on the independent variables (mood, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, concentration, and importance to future goals). This was undertaken in the hope of revealing differences in the pattern of change over time. There was an indication in zero-order correlation of flow with ESM variables that were significantly positive in all contexts, including school work. This showed that an individual's amount and intensity of flow could be associated with an overall quality of experience. The relationship between flow within the context of school work is apparently weaker but still positive. Flow and the quality of experience appeared to remain stable over the span of time between 1993 and 1995.

Hektner and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) state that an advantage to using the ESM in this study is that it gives the ability to examine subjective experiences within a particular context.

In this method of analysis, standardized z-scores for each variable within each wave are used. The scores were anchored to an individual's mean score for each week and have a standard deviation of one. The method allowed comparisons of subjective experience within a context. Using school work as an example, it was revealed that, though providing a highly positive flow experience, it simultaneously brought levels of mood and motivation below weekly averages. School work was indicated to be highly important to future goals, generally requiring a strong focus and concentrated effort consistent with characteristics of flow.

A comparison of the groups showed consistency overall. The 1993 mean flow score was 4.44 (SD = 1.35), and the 1995 mean flow score was 4.48 (SD = 1.08). Flow experience in 1993 was correlated with those in 1995 ( $r = .39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Raw scores of ESM measures were examined to compare the changes in the three groups within the study over time. This enabled the comparison of groups to each other, rather than any context to average experience. In looking at changes in the raw scores overall other than within the context of school work, the subjective experiential change over time could be seen more clearly.

Concerning overall results, the study showed that in the first wave of data collection, individuals who had more flow experiences reported the highest levels of each of the independent variables (mood, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, concentration, and importance to future goals). Both the Increase and Decrease groups had similar means on these variables in the 1993 data but diverged in each domain except mood. All three groups in the study declined in mood.

The data on subjects were engaged in school work showed patterns of means were similar to overall results, with the Stable High Group having the highest means in all measures. Positive experiential correlates of flow were believed to be sustained during school

work because of the perceived importance of their effect on importance of future goals. By contrast, individuals who experienced flow while involved in school work within the Increase Group showed a dramatic rise in school work while their time at leisure decreased. All three groups increased the time spent at school work (9% more of their day) in 1995 over their 1993 totals. Adolescents who decreased their flow time were found to increase time spent at leisure activities, with those experiencing an increase in flow spending the least amount of time at leisure.

Relevance to future goals was assessed independently of the ESM by utilizing a questionnaire. During the 1993 wave of data collection, 35% of the Increase Group, 14% of the Decrease Group, and 28% of the Stable High Group reported that they were involved in doing things relevant to their futures. In 1995, 62% of the Increase Group, 43% of the Decrease Group and 50% of the Stable High Group were involved in career relevant activities.

The results of the study effectively replicated previous findings (Massimini & Carli, 1988; Adlai-Gail, 1994) that flow is a desirable state. The results served to support the study's contention that flow is an experiential state that varies across both activities and individuals, with certain people able to encounter it on a more consistent basis. Of the five other variables, mood was least affected during the optimal experiences, while the episodes did affect self-esteem and concentration to a significant degree.

The study also revealed that increases in flow experiences added to the sense that activities were of importance to the future goals of individuals. Further study showed that individuals who increased flow activities did more school work and built stronger links between these activities and career goals for the future. It was determined that there was a

movement towards intrinsic motivation and a greater engagement in self-directed learning. The findings revealed that students are not in a particularly positive mood while being involved in the drudgery of school work and do not feel intrinsically motivated while engaged. Those who accept the challenges in daily routine feel better about themselves while completing assignments.

Similar methodology involving ESM and day-point sampling was used by Csikszentmihalyi and Thomas Figurski (reference?) in determining self-awareness and adversity in everyday life experiences. The study focused on the relationship between voluntary involvement, individual self-awareness and experiential quality. The fact that the study sample was composed of adults still fits in with the construct of artistic emergence because of aspects of perpetuation observed in Masters of Fine Arts students in this study.

The basis for the study is rooted in an individual's ability to reflect on the quality of experience and become self-aware, leading him or her to enter a new cognitive level. Greater self-awareness is necessary for the development of individuality and personal responsibility (Diener, 1979). Rather than being associated with positive experience, self-awareness is found to negatively impact creativity (Fromm, 1959), openness to new experience (Rogers, 1959) and enjoyment of tasks (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1978). The development of self-awareness can be regarded as an aversive experience because it elicits in the individual the concept of self-evaluation (Duval & Wicklund, 1972).

Csikszentmihalyi and Figurski (1982) contend that their study removes the interrelation of self-awareness, "voluntariness," the act of wanting to do a task (*Self-awareness and aversive experience in everyday life*, 1982 reference) and emotional tone out

of the purely experimental arena prevalent in these earlier studies and into an environment more closely related to everyday life.

Data were gathered by Csikszentmihalyi and Figurski (1982) from a sample of 107 individuals employed by five large companies in the metropolitan Chicago area. Members of the sample held a wide variety of jobs and were from 19 to 63 years of age. Utilizing the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) and the programmed wristwatches described earlier in this literature review, respondents were beeped at random times during their waking hours and asked to record responses on the Random Activities Information Sheets (RAIS). Responses were aligned with three domains considered important to the study: self-awareness, voluntariness, and quality of experience.

Self-awareness (What were you thinking about?) was assessed through categories including physical and emotional states as well as performance at tasks when notified for a response. Comparisons for the variable of self-awareness within the study were made between Self-thoughts (n=378) and Non-self thoughts' (N=4343).

Voluntariness (Why were you doing this?) was assessed after the initial inquiry describing the task in which respondents were involved. Respondents were given three choices in their response: had to, wanted to, or nothing else to do. Coding for this variable was categorized obligatory (N=1,171), voluntary (N=2,382), and combined (N=1,002).

Quality of Experience was measured through the use of three variables: affect, activation, and involvement. Affect was determined through the use of a seven-point scaled based on common factors of emotional tone, with higher scores relating to a more positive affect. The determination of activation relied on a three-point scale based on the common factor of alertness. Again, higher scores revealed a more positive response. Involvement

relied on a 10-point scale with the stem, “Do you wish you had been doing something else?” (A *Longitudinal Exploration of Flow and Intrinsic Motivation in Adolescents*, 1996 ref.). A higher score indicated the wish to be involved in another activity.

Initial results provided from raw data suggested that thinking about the self was a “particularly unpleasant activity,” tying with “work thoughts” for the lowest scores. Preliminary looks at the data also revealed that “self-thought” was also associated with lower levels of activation, rivaling the no-thought classification given to television watching or listening to music.

A deeper analysis of the thought content variable was undertaken after initial data were collapsed into two categories, “self-thought” and “all other thoughts,” in an effort to investigate self-awareness for significant differences in the quality of experience. A total of three separate analysis of variance conducted on the three experimental variables (affect, activation, and involvement) indicated significant relations to differences in both self-awareness and voluntariness. Differences in affect and activation were found to be significant when related to the interaction between self-awareness and voluntariness.

A series of T-tests sufficiently clarified interactions between self-awareness and the three categories of voluntariness (obligatory, voluntary, and combined). Self-thoughts were associated with significantly lower scores than non-self thoughts only in the voluntary domain. No consequential differences were evident in either the obligatory or combined categories that were related to affect. Consistently evident throughout the study, involvement in self-thought was associated with aversive experiences regarding the voluntary category.

The results of the study suggest that an individual’s emotional experience is related to voluntary participation or obligation. The enjoyment of the experience, when linked to self-

awareness, falls somewhere between the poles determining enjoyment and aversion. Voluntary experiences appear to be more positive in terms of affect. Obligatory tasks generally tended to elicit a higher degree of activation due to the necessity of task completion and possible job retention. The relationship between self-awareness and aversive experience is not universally consistent, but evidence from the study indicates that an ideal experience is one in which an individual is engaged while not focused on the self.

Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) preference for the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) is also evident in a longitudinal study of self-concept, self-worth, and affect across adolescence (Moneta, Schneider & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Previously, most research concerning these aspects had sprung from the realm of classic theories of personality development. Storm and Stress theories posited by Hall (1904), Freud (1910) and Erikson (1958) have shaped empirical research, but are inconsistent regarding some populations. This study focused on the issue of emotional disruptions across the span of adolescence rather than on specific points along the way. The sample also covered a broader demographic group which corresponded to a microcosm of society previously not considered in previous research.

The individuals in the sample for Moneta, Schneider and Csikszentmihalyi's study were members of the Alfred P. Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development (*A Longitudinal Study of the Self-Concept and Experiential Components of Self-Worth and Affect Across Adolescence*, 2001 ref) (N=1,109) who were followed over a four-year period with three waves of data collection (1992-93, 1994-95, 1996-97). The initial sample was comprised of middle and high school students from Grades 6, 8, 10 and 12, corresponding to the ages of 12, 14, 16 and 18. Additional respondents were added, rounding out the overall total (N=1,309) during the second and third waves. The gender distribution was 586 (44.8%)

male and 723 (55.2%) female, with an ethnic distribution of 720 (55.0%) White, 205 (15.6%) Hispanic, 288 (22.0%) African-American, 82 (6.3 %) Asian-American, and 12 (.9%) Native American; 2 members of the sample were of unknown ancestry.

Each wave of the study was administered the Teen Life Questionnaire (TLQ; Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000) and the previously described ESM. A programmable wristwatch delivered a total of eight response signals at random points during the waking hours, with respondents being required to complete responses upon receiving the signal. Each ESM form contained a set of open-ended questions which guided respondents in identifying activities within context, and scaled items to measure a wide range of feelings associated with the activity. There were three sets of questions in the TLQ concerned with family composition and structure, global self-esteem, and locus of control.

The first wave of data was used exclusively for indications regarding family structure which revealed a distribution of 707 (53.8%) from traditional families, 243 (18.8%) from single-parent families, 175 (13.3%) from reconstituted families, and 42 (3.2%) from other family groups. Members of the sample from families of unknown structure totaled 142 (10.8%). Global self-esteem was assessed through a seven-item abridged version of Rosenberg's (1979) Self-Esteem Scale. Locus of control was assessed by a six-item abridged version of Rotter's (1966) Locus of Control Scale. All items were rated on a four-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree).

Mathematical modeling of grade trends and additional multilevel modeling were applied to the data. The mathematical modeling of grading trends investigated eight selected dispositional and experiential variables: (a) living up to your own expectations; (b) living up to the expectations of others; (c) feeling successful; (d) feeling in control;



(e) locus of control; (f) global self-esteem; (g) sad/happy; and h) feeling good. One basic mathematical model (Dependent variable =  $\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ grade (linear)} + \beta_2 \text{ grade (quadratic)}$ ) was used to analyze the data. The study states:

All mean regression coefficients  $\beta_0$  through  $\beta_2$  have to be estimated based on data, and may turn out to be either significantly different from or equal to zero. This simple model can adequately describe linear growth or decrease, curvilinear growth or decrease or absence of both. (Moneta, Schneider & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 131)

The researchers estimated the coefficient of this mathematical model by multilevel modeling (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Goldstein, 1987,1995; Longford, 1993). They stated:

In the case of repeated measures, the data structure typically has two levels; individuals are modeled at Level 2 and the single observations performed on them are modeled at Level 1. The modeling proceeds by fitting separate regressions for each individual to obtain an average regression model valid for the entire population from which the individuals were sampled. Multi-level models can handle unbalanced and incomplete streams of repeated measures because the lack of information in any given individual data distribution is counterbalanced by importing information from the general population average model. (p. 131)

For the purpose of the inquiry regarding artistic emergence, the information detailing specific groups within the Moneta, Schneider and Csikszentmihalyi (2001) study will be abridged and will focus on relevant findings. The study found that the components of self-worth exhibit a downward swing during adolescence, with a low point around Grade 10, which corresponds with the dip observed by Gardner (1982). The findings indicated a discontinuity in experiential self-worth except for the feeling of control, which did exhibit a

degree of continuity across adolescence. The two affect variables of feeling good and feeling happy were significant, with low points also occurring at around Grade 10. It is noted that the study found that adolescent girls feel less good and also have lower self-esteem than boys across the span of adolescence, with a trend to higher levels possibly occurring outside the scope of the study.

The sample within the study of artistic emergence is related to the following findings presented in the Moneta, Schneider and Csikszentmihalyi's (2001) research. The model of living up to the expectation of others in traditional and single-parent families reaches a minimum at around Grade 9. The model of feeling successful has a negative impact on individuals from single-parent families, but the early disadvantage recovers by Grade 10. The feeling of being in control also reaches a low point at around Grade 10 for individuals from traditional families with a gradual rebound, while an early disadvantage for those in single-parent families rebounding by the tenth grade.

Csikszentmihalyi (1995) offers some insights into difficulties that have begun to emerge in the field of education and, ultimately, curriculum development for the future. He states that improvements in the field are most likely to fail due to the concept that "education is conceived too narrowly as schooling" (1995, p. 1). He adds that schools continue to limit themselves by focusing on the development of cognitive skills, passing along of factual knowledge and, at best, critical thinking skills.

Contemporary society has been subjected to alarmingly rapid changes in lifestyles that are especially felt at the adolescent stage; adolescents spend very little time with adults. Csikszentmihalyi (1995) presents evidence that American adolescents spend approximately 20% of their waking hours studying at school or at home. They spend 18% of their time with

friends, 6% watching television, and 4% (or more) playing games or being involved in sports. Only 3% of the time is spent reading books or magazines, and 2% (or more) is spent listening to music. In the time that has passed since these data were collected, it is likely that the percentages have must surely have changed, considering texting, online activities and computer gaming. In addition to these factors, an individual's future development is affected by changes within his or her social environment. Csikszentmihalyi (1995) states that an adolescent spends free time alone (26%), with friends (34%), and with classmates (19%), yet will spend fewer than five minutes out of their waking hours with their father. Less time is spent with teachers or other adults. Because of fast-paced technological advances, adult input and effectiveness in an educational capacity have been reduced to a point that can adversely affect the potential for a healthy society in the future. The slow accumulation of knowledge that had been based on cause-and-effect has all but ceased to be a guiding path for education. Past wisdom from an adult population is no longer an adequate option on which to base educational practice because this population cannot keep pace with technological advances.

Csikszentmihalyi (1995) believes that in order to enable children in today's society to develop a more balanced set of beliefs and values, a series of three steps must be taken that will involve adults to work in the context of a rapidly changing world. Csikszentmihalyi (1995) identified these steps as:

1. Mapping the field of forces. The forces which influence young people must be given an in-depth look. These forces described by Csikszentmihalyi include the family, neighborhood and community. Schools and voluntary organizations should also play an integral part in the study, providing input. Physical

environmental factors such as diet, water and air quality should also be taken into account because of the impact they have on young individuals;

2. Choosing targets for research and intervention: Based on findings which emerge from the study, groups responsible for facets of education could begin to focus on specific educational strategies geared toward educational reform; and
3. Diffusion and implementation of findings. Efforts to discover practical applications for educational strategies that are effective in the current environment can provide potential connections to educational remediation. (p. 3)

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) suggested that happiness, an important characteristic of flow experiences, should be a key principle under consideration for a successful formative education. He stated: “We want to be healthy and rich because we expect that these things will make us happy, but we want happiness for its own sake” (Special Report on Happiness, *The Futurist*, Reprint, 1997, p. 4). He added that both young and older individuals are seldom aware of what leads to happiness. An important issue for educators today should include the instruction of what the right path is in finding pleasure. The factors need to encompass those which are associated with autotelic experiences, including activities requiring the development of skills, focus, and personal involvement. Activities such as these include a variety of educational experiences involving the arts as well as those of interpersonal contact and dialog which bridge the generational divide, and those leading to a sense of satisfactory accomplishment felt within the individual.

Situations in which young learners are isolated from appropriate adult interaction and input have the unfortunate potential to lead to a future devoid of practical experience. The positive input of adults and a society’s collective experience can have a profound impact on

an individual's formative education. It may provide avenues for self-awareness and the fulfillment of goals. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) states that when parental involvement is lacking for reasons imposed on it because of the cultural environment, it is up to instructors and community members to establish a solid path toward positive experiences. He feels that the future depends on an educational system that can provide a way for students to experience happiness at educational tasks, in order to propagate a growing love of learning and the revelation that education can be a life-long enjoyable process.

### **Sir Ken Robinson's Concept of Art in Education**

Sir Ken Robinson presented the following insights to the audience during the 6<sup>th</sup> City of York Annual Education Lecture on March 11, 2004, and later included them in his article entitled "Out of Our Minds; Learning to be Creative." These comments have a bearing on artistic emergence from an educational standpoint. Robinson says:

1. Creativity is the process of having original ideas that are of some value; and
2. Creativity is the applied imagination;
3. To be creative, one has to engage in something; and
4. To work in a media; finally,
5. Creativity is not an option, and
6. We must be able to innovate.
7. Creativity is a function of intellect, of imagination. (p. 10)

Globally, people have had their innate creativity educated out of them by a system predicated on a 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial model and fortified by a skewed ethic of academic tradition and high-stakes assessment. In concluding the lecture, Robinson (2006) claims that educational systems currently restrict creative opportunity to a degree in which the majority

of people may never find their media of choice to work in successfully, often leading them to a false assumption that they possess no creative ability. He states that teaching is the heart of education and should incorporate assessment models that support individually unique achievement rather than construct them. Models of assessment should facilitate curriculum development, not lead it.

The problem of educating students solely for jobs they might hold in the future is problematic, given the rapidly changing world we are living in. Robinson (2006, 2008) has become a voice promoting the redefinition of education after careers in both the education and business worlds. Robinson's (2008) premise is that in order for the success of societies in a rapidly changing existence, a major paradigm shift must take place. Educational systems and public and corporate institutions are interdependent on one another. He perceives a breakdown in the connections between the business sector and higher education. What the business world really requires are creative thinkers to propel society forward.

Robinson's background in the educational field has included work at the elementary and secondary levels, and as a professor of Arts Education at the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom. His work at the university level has included instructional education, curriculum development and educational research positions. His work as a business consultant has encompassed educational, cultural, and corporate arenas, leading him to search for important connections linking these realms to provide avenues promoting a richer concept of human talent. He says that the political policy of narrowing curricula and dictating its direction as a necessity for improving economic competitiveness is detrimental to creative growth (The Other Climate Crisis: Digital Culture, Demography and Education, 2008). In

fact, businesses that have contacted him claim that flexibility and a creative edge are things that are critical in today's world.

Robinson (2008) states that these shortcomings amount to an educational “climate crisis” (p. 50), an educational equivalent to the contemporary concerns of global warming and the depletion of global resources. This second crisis has manifested itself as an economic and cultural revolution that is being driven by two driving forces: technology and demographics. He voices a concern that the exponential advances in technology may outpace those who are responsible for its inception, using the example of the Internet and the unanticipated impact it has had on society.

Robinson (2008) also brings into focus the dramatic change in global demographics with a shift in the dominance once held by Western societies to those of “emerging economies” (p. 51) of India, China, and the Middle East. A shift in population density is also occurring in these regions from rural areas to the cities. Robinson (2008) comments that rather than taking this into account, national educational systems around the globe are steadily plodding down the wrong path and are narrowly focused.

Research conducted by Robinson (2006) has revealed that current educational systems are based on 19<sup>th</sup>-century models and were initially developed in response to industrial economies that have become hopelessly antiquated in our world. He points out these examples (2006):

1. Educational systems focus students on the preparation of what lies ahead; learn for now, but at a job work later;
2. Educational systems follow a linear path, with age effectively acting as a batch number and students as products of the system;

3. Educational systems utilize a standardized curriculum and assessment model that favors conformity and suppresses uniqueness;
4. Educational systems are ‘driven by assumptions of economic utility’ placing an emphasis on core subjects of math, science, and language arts while pushing the arts to the bottom;
5. Instruction beyond the elementary level proceeds through a division of labor among curricular specialties, with instructor employed to teach subjects rather than student.

Robinson’s (2008) findings have shown that in almost all developed countries, the current set of assumptions about economic utility almost always base intelligence on certain forms of critical analysis that is linked to verbal and mathematical reasoning. He states that most national and regional governments have an increased desire to reform educational systems for economical and cultural reasons. He claims is that for reform to be successful, a change of metaphors from “an industrial to an organic model of culture and education” (p. 53) is needed to trigger the process. Using the metaphor of taxonomy to illustrate the predominant educational environment, Robinson (2008) points out that the grouping and categorizing of things is an interesting way to observe them and learn. In doing so, one can easily overlook the dynamics of the systems in which they operate. Many subjects are currently being taught in a compartmentalized fashion with a weak degree of the interconnectedness so vital for seeing the whole picture.

Robinson’s (2008) agenda for change begins the premise that people younger than 25 were born into a digital world. Those over that age have difficulties in totally comprehending many facets of the digital world, being competent at best, but not truly a part of it. Digital



technology is taken for granted within this younger population, leading Robinson (2008) to question who should be instructing whom. He states (2008): “The typical history of immigrant communities is that the children teach the parents the new culture” (p. 54) and those over 25 are the digital immigrants of society. Those under 25 have begun to redefine what comprises identity, sharing sometimes sensitive personal information online in what Robinson (2008), citing Nussbaum (2007), states is the first significant generation gap since the birth of rock-and-roll music. Robinson also cites Andrew Keen (2008), pointing out the concern over the collapse of intellectual and aesthetic standards that has been brought about by user-generated content online without gate-keepers to act as guides.

Robinson (2008) feels it is essential to develop powers of creativity in a systematic way. He claims that the time spent taking things for granted must be addressed to encompass the unrealized human sixth and seventh senses of balance and intuition (p. 55). To Robinson (2008), imagination is the most important thing about human capacity that is taken for granted: “the only one, in my opinion, that sets us apart from other creatures on earth” (p. 56). Imagination allows people to conceive and produce something that previously did not exist.

According to Robinson (2008), basic alterations to perception regarding creativity need to evolve. Creativity is most often associated with the arts, yet it must be realized as being part of all fields of study. Creativity is not the attribute of a few special individuals but of everyone. New technology has put the ability for creative outcomes in the hands of everyone. The common belief that some people are creative while others are not is a misconception. The possibility of remediation in schools and universities where original thinking is routinely developed and practiced can affect the future.

Robinson (2008) offers three levels of activation for the transformation of education: personal, group, and cultural. Intelligence is extremely diverse and dynamic. He states that original thinking emerges “specifically by connecting ideas from different domains and modes of thought, especially through analogies and metaphors” (2008, p. 57). Robinson believes intelligence is individualized and unique and that creation and innovation are an offshoot of these features. The diversity of intelligent input makes groups an excellent vehicle in bringing change by bringing individuals with different ideas together. The dynamics of effective groups working together can use these individual thoughts to facilitate and enrich the transformational process. Groups are also distinct, coming together to serve a specific purpose, then disbanding and reconfiguring to serve another.

Culturally, Robinson (2008) revisits the initial points made on the composition of the educational model. He concludes a paradigm shift needs to occur in order to avert the educational climate crisis he has envisioned and described. He offers these insights with respect to changing existing educational culture:

1. School must be seen as an opportunity to be approached as a life-long process, rather than on of something to prepare for before working at a job;
2. Educational linearity must be changed to incorporate intergenerational components, with learning occurring where it presents itself;
3. Educational models must be customizable in order to meet local and cultural needs in order to develop individual potentials;
4. Educational systems must see that all subjects rely on each other and be balanced to promote strong and vibrant societies; and

5. Educational systems must include provisions enabling the process of inquiry throughout the fabric of education, rather than one which relies on the compartmentalization of studies.

### **Verifications of Artistic Emergence**

A recent inquiry undertaken by University of Melbourne affiliates Barnaby Nelson and David Rawlings (2007) has sought to further define assumptions concerning creativity and its importance. It has value because it identifies conditions which enhance creative ability. Nelson and Rawlings (2007) define phenomenology as the study of the subjectively experienced dimension of the creative process. The qualitative inquiry attempts to reconceptualize psychological research in the form of a new paradigm emphasizing description, understanding, and meaning. Essential questions driving the inquiry ask how creativity is experienced and what role the experience plays in an individual's life. Implications of the study's analysis center on the contribution that creative experience plays in understanding why people with particular personality traits may be attracted to creative work. Nelson and Rawlings' (2007) study has possible links to artistic emergence, and is resonant with statements offered by both Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson.

Nelson and Rawlings have based this inquiry on Reinder's (1992) study which investigated artistic creativity through open-ended interviews. Three professional artists involved in the fields of choreography, painting, and musical composition contributed to the earlier study. Interviews questions probed for in-depth descriptive accounts of experiences related to the creation of recent projects and focused on the ways problems were perceived and solved.

The Reinder (1992) study indicated a generally perceived sense that there was something lacking in artistic existence, which then engaged an artistic desire in the respondents to produce something to fill the void. Within the state of tension between emptiness and fulfillment, the artist was compelled to engage in a process of exploration. Repeated trials and variations motivated artists towards desired outcomes. The artists actively manipulated their choice of media as exploration serving to clarify and distill a sense of purpose. It became evident that there was an apparent dichotomy of purposive/playfulness, with knowledge previously called upon to reach previous goals being suppressed by the artist. This occurred while the he or she sought new configurations of elements relating to the new work being created. Another paradox implied in Reinder's inquiry was that of distance/engagement, an alternation between the immersion of actively manipulating the chosen media and observing the proceedings from the viewpoint of an audience. Throughout the explorative process, the artist assumed an attitude of risk-taking while responding to the dichotic demands imposed by the creative process and the activation of intuition and emotion.

Nelson and Rawlings' sample consisted of professional artists (N=11) which included five musicians, two writers, two visual artists, one writer/visual artist, and one playwright/theater director. It was determined that the sample's diversity would supply a well-rounded set of conclusions allowing for an analysis of elements which would remain invariant across the disciplines. When the responses offered during the interviews ceased to add to data relating to "lived meaning", further explication of artistic production, (*Its Own Reward: A Phenomenological Study of Artistic Creativity*, p. 223 ref.), it was felt that a saturation point was reached and further interviews were halted.

Interview questions probed descriptions of an artistic experience from which the artist emerged pleased and satisfied with the finished work. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews designed to direct the artist towards the creative process while not predetermining its interactive content.

Nelson and Rawlings (2007) approached the phenomenological analysis which evolved from contact with unique phenomenon related to the questions generating their inquiry. The purpose of the analysis was to derive a description of the essential features, or logic, of the creative experience by unraveling each interview. The make-up of experiential constituents and the interrelationships existing between them resulted in a description known as Individual Structure. A similar analysis across individual cases yielded essential and invariant data which constituted General Structure. There was a tightly interwoven structure between constituents. Data were arranged into four general categories: (a) General Context, (b) Specific Context, (c) the Production Itself, and (d) the After-Effects. Each of the general categories was subdivided into a total of 19 constituents.

General Context was broken into two constituents: (a) commitment to artistic activity and (b) routine to artistic activity. Analytical results showed that a commitment to artistic activity might have an influence on how artists structure their daily lives. They were experienced as an allowance often enabling a higher degree of dedication to be directed toward artistic endeavors.

Specific Content is linked to the constituent (c) being settled in preparation for the process of doing the artwork. Analytical results determined that this preparation tends to be mental rather than physical or technical. Preparatory activities often allowed the artist to more fully experience creative output while reaching higher levels of potential success.

The Production Itself was separated into a total of 15 separate constituents to cover the total scope of the creative experience. There is strong resonance between some of the constituents and Csikzentmihalyi's (1991) description of flow at points along the analysis.

The constituent (d) narrowing of focus and deep absorption in the artwork refers to the preliminary state which the artist enters. It is the process of detachment from peripheral stimuli which precedes a reduction of awareness of the artist's immediate surroundings and the passage of time. The concentrated focus of attention in Nelson and Rawlings's (2007) inquiry was associated with "a heightened sensitivity to the medium and the particularities of the piece on which the artist is working" (p. 228). The period of initial detachment was found to be either protracted or sporadic, depending on the individual and the experience.

The constituent (e) *a* sense of new synthesis of elements related to the growing focus of attention to the synthesis of internal and external elements relevant to the work. Combining and recombining of these elements triggers a deepening interest and involvement encouraging a heightened sense of focus.

The constituents (f) confidence in artistic activity, (g) lack of awareness of technical aspects of artistic activity, and (h) effortlessnes of artistic activity, described creative aspects of experience corresponding to Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) flow construct. The sense of unfolding clarity regarding artistic direction promoted a perception of ease. This was linked to a sense of growing confidence and diminishment of technical awareness. While under the influence of the creative experience, working became instinctual.

Constituent (i) dominance of intuitive mental processes associated with Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) contention that intuitiveness equates to an openness. This is a state

in which the artist casts aside self-critical affect and allows the experience to emerge without self-judgment.

Constituent (j) unity in a sense of self signaled the suspension of self-awareness while the artist became totally absorbed in the realm of the creative experience. Nelson and Rawlings (2007) describe the state as “a lack of distinction between thought and the act of expression” (p. 232). It is during this experiential state that artists become unaware of the passage of time and physicality.

The constituents (k) sense of joy, (l) sense of freedom, and (m) sense of purity relate to the artist’s feelings and mood while under the influence of the creative process. The affective state of the artist drove the creative activity forward and perpetuated the activity. Deep engagement while working provided a delay in the analysis associated with self-awareness and cognitive reflection.

The constituent (n) an attitude of exploration and discovery was associated with the sense of exploration of artistic changes to original concepts first realized as work began. The sense of exploration balances these original concepts with receptivity to new ideas which presented themselves as the work developed.

The constituent (o) self-generating momentum described the self-motivational push that was experienced while actively creating. The excitement that was present during the creative experience became an important factor that promoted deeper engagement in the work.

The constituent (p) change in a sense of control over self and/or the artwork became manifest as either a heightened or diminished sense of control. The artist perceived a realization that the artwork is original in thought and continued the creative activity with

confidence. The artist perceived a diminished sense of control if he or she were merely a receiver of the ideas rather than originators of them.

The constituent (q) movement between intuitive and analytical processes signaled a movement out of flow and into a more critically aware state, and back again. These fluctuations between states allowed the artist to build upon elements present in the work through the critical analysis of what he or she had completed.

The constituent (r) movement in and out of self-awareness related to a loss of enjoyment, where the intuitive mode of absolute focus succumbed to that of purely analytical attention between the context of the activity and the experience itself. The physical aspects of the environment began to return.

The final constituent (s) intensely felt emotional reaction to completing the artwork related to feelings of satisfaction and success at having captured a creative concept. There was an accompanying feeling of vulnerability, which was proceeded by the desire to recreate a similar creative experience. The reaction, in some cases, induced a transformation as to how the artist may approach new and future projects.

Though the findings of Nelson and Rawlings's (2007) study indicate that it is through intuitive processes that the artist grasps the meaning and configuration of the artwork, the dynamic between intuitive and analytical processes are an integral part of the creative experience. The dominance of intuition and lack of self-awareness during the experience achieve a balance with the analytical self, creating a second dynamic. A third dynamic is the tension created between the freedoms perceived during the flow experience and the constraints of self-awareness, vulnerability, and a sense of completeness which were also present.



Nelson and Rawlings's (2007) emphasis on artistic creativity was the emergence of an artistic object. This occurred through the process of artistic engagement while using a medium of choice and an attitude of exploration carried through to completion. Nelson and Rawlings's inquiry uncovered the understanding that the artist discovers elements he or she is curious about, and recognizes chance or accidental developments within the process as important parts of the creative experience.

A key finding was the synthesis of internal and external characteristics associated with the artwork. This elemental blend acted as a trigger for perpetuating a sense of excitement leading to a deeper engagement. In essence, this corresponded to inspiration. Inspiration occurred during what was described as General Context—commitment to artistic activity and routine to artistic activity. The intuitive state of inspiration needs a counterbalance of conscious analysis. There was an alignment with the concept of autotelic experiences that corresponded with the constituents (d) narrowing of focus and deep absorption in the artwork, (f) confidence in artistic activity, (g) lack of awareness of technical aspects of artistic activity, and (h) effortlessness of artistic activity. Nelson and Rawlings (2007) also stated that flow-like conditions present during creative activities offer only a partial representation of the total experience. The constituents Specific Content—(c) *being settled in preparation for the process of doing the artwork* and constituent (s) *intensely felt emotional reaction to completing the artwork*, were not presented in Csikszentmihalyi's *intensely felt emotional reaction to completing the artwork* original research and round out the total creative experience attributed to the construct of flow.

## **Summary**

### **What Triggers Artistic Emergence?**

The information presented in this chapter reveals the connections between artistic emergence and the continuum of cognitive development. Lowenfeld (1949) and Gardner (1980, 1982) aligned artistic growth and awareness to a Piagetian framework, with new stages of development dependent on the experiential accumulation of knowledge acquired from those preceding it. Lowenfeld felt that the stages of artistic development tended to blend together more fluidly than those of Piaget.

Both Gardner, who cites earlier research by Schaefer-Simmern (1948), and Lowenfeld stated that symbol usage in childhood was developed and recombined through experience into newer, more elaborate artwork as they progressed through each new level. Lowenfeld and Gardner were both in agreement that early childhood is a period of unbridled creativity, free from the constraints of self-critical judgment. When artistic freedom is allowed to flourish in a positive and nurturing environment, conditions may coalesce to present triggers necessary to develop a passion for visual art.

Lowenfeld (1987) and Gardner (1994) presented evidence that artistic growth reached a stalling point in its upward momentum in early adolescence. The ability to render an artistic product is impeded by the growth of self-awareness. There is a realization that what is conceptualized by the individual cannot be rendered due to the lack of acquired skills. This overwhelming sense of inability often turns an individual away from visual art if not for parental support and instructional guidance. An adolescent may establish a holding pattern, reexamining a particular schema repeatedly while seeking positive feedback from adults.

Adult support can act as an effective trigger for continued progress and reemergence from the depths of self-criticism.

Positive reinforcement can effectively promote a sense of happiness during the creative experience. Csikszentmihalyi (1995) provided information that points to happiness as a potential trigger for repeated exploration and perpetuation in visual art. Individuals who reach a cognitive level of self-awareness can learn to achieve a balance between focus and judgment, using the creative tension to trigger repeated experiences. With the ability to promote autotelic, or self-goal oriented, behaviors, adolescents are more likely to find motivation to pursue visually artistic work. This was the case if the work involved a clear goal, had creative options to explore, and utilized creative skills in completing the project. Positive feedback enhances the chances for the perpetuity needed for artistic emergence to occur.

The keys for triggering artistic emergence appear to be in the hands of parents and instructors involved in the lives of potential artists. If a positive environment that promotes guided risk-taking related to creative exploration is provided, triggers may act to unlock the gates that block the artistic progress during childhood and adolescence. Positive feedback offered by those involved who comprise the audience for artistic products can offset the caustic effects of self-awareness and criticism.

### **When Does Artistic Emergence Generally Occur?**

The point at which the positive, artistic experiences that individuals amass arrive at a tipping point has received little attention by researchers. One specific epiphany leading to artistic emergence is a seemingly rare occurrence. Gardner's (1984) premise that a crystallizing experience could prompt what is essentially this type of epiphany was found to

have no merit. Hypothetical perspectives underlying this study converge on the concepts that artistic development and human development both occur in stages. Artistic emergence appears to occur in incremental stages, with one positive experience triggering others. At any point in the path, the conscious decision to turn away from the goal of visual artistic emergence may occur. Negative impacts in personal or educational environments may open a door to new interests in personal growth, leaving those who were formerly motivated on a developmental plateau.

In essence, young children are rarely equipped to successfully emerge artistically due to a lack of experiential background. This can be attributed to the underdeveloped triad of intelligences that would lead to success. The three realms of neural, experiential and reflective intelligence (Perkins, 1994) make up the formative whole that younger children are still in the process of developing.

Neural intelligence encompasses the contribution of the central nervous system responsible for motor skills and learning styles. Younger children are only beginning to acquire these attributes, thus limiting artistic emergence to a formative nature. Experiential intelligence is related to recall and action derived from past experiences. The limited number of quality experiences related to art production means that children can only emerge to certain stages as new cognitive connections are opened.

Reflective intelligence is the ability for individuals to assess and act on previous experiences, a factor that would also have a limiting effect on most children. Reflection associated with deeper meaning can only occur from the Late Gang Stage (*Creative and Mental Growth*, 1987) onward. These three intelligence domains work to build off each other in order to develop a critical mass which enables mature artistic emergence.

As visual artists arrive at a self-sustaining level of production and self-awareness, they are better prepared to seek out new creative experiences that perpetuate interest. Csikszentmihalyi (1995) stated that creative experiences which are viewed as positive and fulfilling are small triggering events leading to the portal of artistic emergence. Therefore, a tipping point can only occur when the accumulation of these experiences and greater cognitive awareness create the proper conditions.

### **What are the Relationships Between School Experience and Artistic Emergence?**

American educational systems and those in developed countries around the globe are experiencing unprecedented need for revision due to technological advances. Robinson (2008) states that to educate for the future means envisioning a world that resists all attempts to do so. Changes that are occurring render the future unimaginable.

Csikszentmihalyi (1995) made references to current home and school environments that do not include effective direction in order to find pleasure in learning or opportunities for optimal experiences. He stated that (1995) “schools generally fail to teach how beautiful science and mathematics can be; they teach the routine of literature and history rather than the adventure” (p.12). His review has shown that exposure to cumulative optimal experiences during their educational career both in and out of school can contribute to a fulfilling direction in life.

Csikszentmihalyi (1995) and Robinson (2006, 2008) both offer insights which pertain to changes in society, technology and education. Research by Csikszentmihalyi in 1995 revealed that nearly one fifth of an American adolescents’ time is spent at school and a third of it is spent with friends. Very little one-on-one time was spent with instructors or other adults. These numbers surely have changed in light of the newest technologies that have

appeared since then. This illustrates the need for the formulation of strategies that would involve more positive interaction between adults and adolescents. Robinson (2008) adds that the role may be to offer moral guidance based on life experiences outside the technological realm that those under 25 years of age are acclimated to. Education has the potential to become a formative endeavor for societies at large if it contained the intergenerational circulation cut off by technology.

Inherently enjoyable experiences present themselves more readily at earlier periods in life, especially in the visual arts. The newness of discovery is apparent, motivating young students with the proper feedback. The appearance of self-awareness in adolescence inhibits wonder and progress if supports from adults in both home and educational environments are not available to provide balance.

### **What Considerations Must be Present for Perpetuation of This Interest?**

Those who are raised in an artistically rich home environment with supportive, indulgent adults as guides would naturally seem to have a predisposition to consider the pursuit of visual art as a personal interest. The potential stimuli present in having works to look at and build from may be a factor in the perpetuation for exploration. Artwork that is perceived to be treasured can motivate artists towards artistic emergence. Both Lowenfeld (1987) and Csikszentmihalyi (1995) stated the crucial importance of such conditions. The fostering artistic curiosity can carry over into the educational environment in early childhood with the right instructor present in the child's life. Sensitive instructors who can expose students to new and more focused experiences concerned with aspects of visual art can strengthen the importance that it has in their daily lives.

The perpetuation of artistic emergence is also carried along in early childhood because of the structure of the educational environment. From preschool onward, art activities can expose students to the act of artistic creation and with potential for perpetuation based on the newness of pleasurable acts. Gardner (1982) mentions the period of childhood as a golden age of creative, unselfconscious creativity. On a conscious level, each project may contain characteristics of optimal experiences, spurring them to repeat creative actions.

Later, students within educational system are offered visual art as a requirement through the eighth grade, where they develop the skill sets needed for further perpetuation. After freshman year, music and visual art become elective courses. The base that has been established in earlier grades provides the confidence to show these artistic strengths under with proper support. Lowenfeld (1987), Gardner (1994), and Csikszentmihalyi (1995) point to this period where the proper guidance and support are necessary to perpetuate an interest in visual art.

This literature review has brought to light the importance of a positive, nurturing environment and the impact that instructional and aesthetic feedback can have on the perpetuation of artistically creative passion. Questions concerning perpetuation remain only partially answered. Given the uncertainty and predictions voiced by Robinson(2006, 2008) concerning the future, how does a perpetuation in visual art transfer and fit into the scheme of things to come?

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

This chapter provides a clear understanding of how this researcher collected and analyzed data presented by selected informants (Spradley, 1979). A brief biography of the researcher is provided, offering insight into the rationale for the study, based on the researcher's passion for visual art. Research questions, as well as the description of both naturalistic inquiry and grounded theory driving this study, have been provided. The researcher has also detailed analysis specific to qualitative methodology. References for the detailed descriptions of the informants in the sample, the ethical gathering of data, and potential limitations have been documented, also.

#### **The Researcher's Biography**

This inquiry was undertaken to discover the causal details in which artistic emergence begins to become manifest. This researcher pondered his early artistic awareness, wondering if certain triggers in this emergence were common among artists. Preliminary questions included how this emerging awareness was sparked and at what age did schooling and collective experience influence individual reasoning?

For the past 40 years, the researcher has worked as a student and a professional artist, creating work in a wide variety of media. By operating within a circle of artistic peers, actively working in picture-framing establishments throughout Connecticut, and managing a frame shop and art gallery of his own, the researcher experienced the many facets of what being involved in visual art entails. Nevertheless, he participated in little discussion with peers of what triggered this involvement or of the perceptions that visual artists share. During this time, the researcher regularly reflected on his past and on the creative process; however,



not until recently did he think of the collective experiences of all who work in the field of visual art. What brought them to this path in their lives?

After 18 years as a professional picture framer and gallery owner, this researcher acquired a Pre-K through Grade 12 teaching certification, and is now in his 16<sup>th</sup> year as an educator. While teaching at the elementary level for 10 years, he saw that young students accumulate the experiences that shape who they become as artists from both the home and from the school setting. Some students seemed hard-wired for developing quality visual artwork; further, with coherently articulated imaginations, they were able to justify their creations. This researcher had the unique opportunity to follow some of these promising students through their careers within the school system as new teaching opportunities presented themselves. Through the intermediate level, which included grades five and six in this particular school district, he noticed that recognition and positive feedback on the part of instructors seemed to buoy the students to achieve a greater measure of success, particularly in visual art. Was this the case for other visual artists as well? How could this reinforcement that could help perpetuate interest be incorporated into the instructional curriculum of students in their formative years?

As an instructor in a public high school, this researcher presently has a group of students consisting of those who have the skills necessary for future artistic achievement and those who are placed into art classes as a last resort for garnering academic success. During time spent in a visually artistic educational setting, this researcher found that it was easy to see that the freedom within an artistic environment offers this wide range of individuals a place for personal expression and comfort, attesting to the power of visual art in an educational environment. This researcher can envision the development of an enhanced

visual art curriculum based on the findings presented in this inquiry with the potential to benefit visual artists and the general student population.

### **Statement of Ethics and Confidentiality**

Permission for students to participate in this research was sought from the district superintendent, each school principal, and all parents of students under the age of 18 (see Appendixes A, B, and C). To assure confidentiality, each participant was assigned a confidential identification number. All data were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office and were maintained there until the findings were published; accessibility was limited to other researchers for whom the data might prove useful in further comparative analyses and who are enrolled in Western Connecticut State University's Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership program.

### **Informants: Setting, Subjects and the Sampling Procedure**

The informants for this study were comprised of four Advanced Placement (AP) high school students, two Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), and four Master of Fine Arts (MFA) students selected as a purposive sample ( $N = 10$ ) of individuals. The sample was selected for this study with the help of instructors and professors most familiar with each student's past performance and continued creative drive. In their fulfillment of intensive portfolio preparation and their pursuit of artistic interests of study, all informants have exhibited a keen drive and a personal need to more fully explore creative challenges at each of their respective levels of education. These characteristics were verified by their AP mentors and instructors (see Appendix D).

### **Advanced Placement Informants**

The sample of four AP informants was selected from a suburban community in southern New England and enrolled in a public high school. The community has a population of approximately 35,000, with about 1,600 students at the high school level. Like so many in the area, this particular community has seen an economic downturn and is struggling to find a post-manufacturing identity.

The students taking part in the research come from middle-income families that are intact but suffer common hardships related to the current economic situation. Nevertheless, all of these students have planned to attend an art school. This stands as a testimony to the impact visual art has had on them, and the commitment of their families to support the informant's personal choice in this field of study.

The four high school students selected for this inquiry were enrolled in the AP painting and design portfolio preparation course, which is designed to place them at a higher level of ability upon their entry into college. They became aware of the study through their AP teacher. This researcher was introduced to the students in the school they were attending. After they had agreed to participate, the informants were provided with a letter detailing the study to bring home to their parents (see Appendix A).

Interviews took place at the high school the informants attended during the autumn of 2007, with each interview lasting from 25 to 45 minutes. During this time, the informants responded to questions and showed their artwork. This researcher was able to see the quality in their work that had led them to consider the AP program. During subsequent time spent in their classroom, further details concerning peer and instructor support were noticed. These

students had the opportunity to review and clarify their interview comments as part of member checking procedures when they received transcripts.

In fulfilling the AP obligations, these students worked with a trained mentor to build and effectively assess a developing body of work. Successful applicants<sup>1</sup> were allowed to begin the body of their coursework and skip freshman foundations programs at participating colleges. In effect, AP students already surmounted their first obstacle as beginning artists.

AP artwork portfolio guidelines are extremely exacting and require that artwork grouped into three categories: breadth, concentration, and quality. A brief overview of the AP portfolio selection process is necessary to understand its complexity.

### **AP Portfolio Development**

*Teachers.* Classes are taught by teachers who have been trained to teach AP coursework. Teachers attend a week-long seminar scheduled at various locations, usually over summer break. During this time, the indicators exhibited by candidates' levels of proficiency are discussed. Teachers undergoing the training view examples of artwork comprising the levels that provide a framework for assessment. When trained, instructors are able to select students who can successfully complete an exemplary portfolio. Three sections are prescribed in the program of studies for AP portfolio preparation: breadth; concentration; and quality.

*Breadth.* Breadth refers to the variety of media that the student has explored. There must be 12 pieces of artwork in this category. The work must show the processes that the student has followed in its production, and not all are required to be considered masterpieces.

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<sup>1</sup> Entry into the AP level of study is gained with a supervisory instructor's recommendation.

*Concentration.* Twelve works are also required for the Concentration category. These pieces focus on one particular subject or theme. Some frequently chosen themes are self-portraiture or multiple views of an object and are limited only by imagination and creative skill. This category must show evidence of the student's observational skills and uniqueness in portraying his or her vision of the subject.

*Quality.* The five pieces of art that comprise the Quality category showcase the student's ability in one artistic media. The work must exhibit a proficiency in the media of the student's choice.

Artwork selected in each category is painstakingly photographed and transformed into slides that must highlight the artwork. The development of the portfolio is the responsibility of student and his or her family. Poor quality slides are detrimental to the student's chances of being accepted into the program. The slides are placed in a rigidly specific order and sent out to be assessed by AP judges. Rejection of the portfolios the result of not following rules regarding AP guidelines. Slides are graded on a scale from 1 (unacceptable) to 6 (exemplary).

AP informants seem to be closest to the point at which a conscious decision for emerging as an artist can be made by an individual: closest to the experiences that shaped them into viewing art as a means of enjoyment or as an avenue for creative output. They are at a more mature level of cognizance to reflect and build from fresh creative experiences. The relationship between their school experiences and the desire to pursue artistic emergence is freshest at this point. Until the high school level, art programming is mandatory in public schools. Therefore, their conscious choice to take art as an elective is only a first step along the path. Their commitment to submit to the AP courses of study placed them well above the

average student in terms of maturity and cognizance, so this researcher chose them for the study.

### **Bachelor of Fine Arts Informants**

The two informants who were BFA candidates were selected because of their practiced facility in artistic media. The pair began their careers as students in urban and suburban communities with populations of between 30,000 and 100,000 people. The students are now are enrolled in schools and colleges in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Each of these informants was recommended to this study by instructors who work at different educational levels. One was referred by her former AP instructor, and the other was referred to the study by her mother, who is a colleague and an elementary art teacher in the researcher's district (see Appendix C).

Data collection took place over the 2007 winter break. The researcher had the opportunity to see one informant working as a high school senior during the previous year. This created a degree of trust and comfort during the interview. The informant was on a visit to show artwork to former teachers and had scheduled the interview. It was approximately 90 minutes long and took place in the high school studio. Transcripts of the interview were reviewed by this informant and accepted with no additional clarifications.

The second informant was interviewed at her home. This contributor was known as a result of her early inclusion in a summer arts program in which the researcher had the opportunity to work at with her mother. Her early involvement and later education outside of public school provided a different perspective on visual art. It was hoped that her information would offer a unique point of view regarding emergence as an artist. The interview was approximately one hour long. There was an opportunity to see her artwork and the family's

utilization of her creative input regarding the color and décor of the rooms. The informant was provided with the interview transcript, which she amended to include information of a change in major from general design to furniture design.

Parental and family support enabled these informants to pursue their artistic interests. They have gained confidence through life experience and advanced coursework. It was evident during the interviewing process that they had reflected on the important personal choices and reasons that caused artistic emergence and were enthusiastic about being involved in visual art. As a result, they were able to provide valuable details that enriched this study.

### **Master of Fine Arts Informants**

The four MFA informants were selected from students attending a state university in Connecticut. The MFA program, was initiated in 2000 and accredited in January, 2003, offered coursework in illustration and painting. Informants were near New York and other cultural hubs in New England.

The MFA students came from a variety of cities and towns and possessed a wide spectrum of background experiences. They had come far along the path of artistic emergence, creating professional work at the terminal level of their educational careers. MFA informants contributing to this study have done commissioned work for private individuals and school, and developed conceptual renderings and other finished works. One informant has spent a considerable amount of time on a series of illustrations which she will use in a children's book she is developing.

The selection was undertaken with the help of the MFA program director, who had produced a list of students who showed an interest in the study after they had received the

Informant Nomination Form (see Appendix D). The list was generated at a weekly critique. All names were written by the students for a total of eight nominees. Contact was made with two students and interviews began in spring of 2008. This proved to be a stressful time to initiate the study because of work being completed for a scheduled art show.

The students were questioned in their studio spaces at the university, where pieces of their work were on view. The interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes. Contact was made with another nominee during the initial meetings, and this person was interviewed the following week. A follow-up meeting with each informants occurred at the art show, when another informant accepted an interview the following week. Each of the informants was offered a transcript of their interviews, but none provided clarifications or additional information. One informant at this level did not participate in member checking. Male respondents did not return calls or participate in the study. Unified by an apparently high degree of ability within their chosen media, students at the MFA level were able to provide insight into and reasoning about the perpetuation of their artistic pursuit. For informant details, see Table 1.



Table 1

*Informants Details*

Education level	Preferred media	Career aspirations
Advanced Placement		
Informant H	Photography	Not determined
Informant C	Mixed techniques	Computer -aided design
Informant K	Painting	Not determined
Informant M	Mixed Techniques	Not Determined
Bachelor of Fine Arts		
Informant J	Painting/stenciled graffiti	Furniture design
Informant S	Photography	Photojournalism/fashion
Master of Fine Arts		
Informant A	Painting/drawing	Illustration
Informant G	Painting/mixed media	Teaching/gallery shows
Informant T	Painting/landscape	Commissions/gallery shows
Informant F	Painting/figurative	Commissions/gallery shows

*Note.* Mixed techniques show a search for a medium. At upper levels in the study, a future path indicates full artistic emergence.

## **Methodology**

Through this research technique, adequate representations through multiple constructed realities of artistic emergence were established. Thorough descriptions of context and setting detailed how each informant became involved in visual art. Each contributor's early home and school environment was probed to determine early triggers that might have had an impact on eventual artistic emergence. In this approach, theory was allowed to emerge without the reliance on a strictly prescribed path. Each of the informants was questioned through carefully formulated strategies using Spradley's (1979) method utilizing semi-structured interviewing techniques.

The interviews provided thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that included each informant's perceptions of his or her realities in visual art. By definition, thick description as related to this inquiry has provided data essential to the understanding of the underlying causes of an individual's emergence and continued interest in visual art. There is believed to be sufficient description within this study to offer a base on which to build future inquiry into related to issues of transferability.

Questioning was grouped into descriptive, structural, and contrast categories. Descriptive interview questions gave the researcher a broad view of the informants' overall perceptions of visual art when they were young. Analysis of the responses created a body of information that was probed further by utilizing structural and contrast questions. These questions allowed the interviewer to funnel information by verifying domain-specific, terminological, and semantic relationships developed from the domain analysis. Deeper analysis and questioning allowed the researcher to uncover common triggers and shared

experiences. Possible strategies for sustained experiences have also emerged from within this body of information.

## **Research Design**

### **Qualitative Inquiry**

Naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were the chosen design methods to conduct this research. The theory relied on systematically gathered descriptive input while the researcher was embedded in the informants' environments. The prolonged engagement within a variety of artistic fields by the researcher formed the background for gathering richly descriptive data constructed within each informant's life. A concrete positivist (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) paradigm that follows a strictly empirical path is contrary to that of naturalistic inquiry. An uncovering of theory grounded in informant responses was analyzed and used to drive this research. Hypotheses did not drive this investigation; they emerged as the information presented was revealed through informant responses in combination with the researcher's personal involvement in this inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Within the naturalistic paradigm, reality is not a linear singularity in scope; each individual presents unique realities constructed from personal and collective experiences, multiple perspectives, and multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the researcher and informants interacted to draw out and bring into being the reasons visual art became an important part their lives. The researcher had effectively become a human instrument able to reason and evaluate the richness of informant responses and to tease out intricate details. The researcher's interest in seeking the reasons surrounding artistic emergence allowed for a more accurate reading of informant posturing and discourse. Each

case study was based on its own particularities because of the uniqueness of each individual, thus eliminating the consistency sought within empirical studies. This has blurred the line between cause and effect in the case of this inquiry. Within the naturalistic paradigm, generalizability has been expressed through a focus on individual cases, each being subject to change as the data emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Important Components of Naturalistic Inquiry**

Naturalistic inquiry is based on a set of axioms or principles that guide research and are inherently different from other forms of inquiry. Rather than a reality composed of independent variables and operations which can become known, predicted and controlled, a naturalistic paradigm states that reality is constructed from multiple frames of reference. Inquirer and the focus of the inquiry interact and influence each, building a body of knowledge to generate “working hypotheses” (Lincoln & Guba, p. 38) describing individuals cases.

Possibly the most striking difference between conventional and naturalistic inquiry is the non-objective, value-bound, quality established through the choices made by the researcher in the latter form. In naturalist inquiry, the inquirer controls the choice and the framing of the problem of the study and the methodology in seeking answers. The inquiry is influenced by the choice of “substantive theory” (Lincoln & Guba, p. 38) used in guiding collection, analysis and interpretation of the data collected. Contextual values inherent to the study are influential to its outcome. If all elements exhibit congruence or value-resonance, the study has generated meaningful results.

Naturalistic inquiry contains important criteria for research that are equivalent to those in quantitative research methods. This study relied on the concept of trustworthiness,

an alternate equivalent to internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. The principle of trustworthiness is based upon five characteristics acting as appropriate measures within naturalistic research: “truth value,” credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) cite Julianne Ford (p. 14) in her assertion that truth, in concept, has four different meanings. First, the concept of empirical truth can be confirmed or denied. Then, the concept of logical truth is implied through a comparison to something that is already determined to be true. A third definition is associated with ethical and professional truth, assumed through adherence to predetermined and established guidelines. The fourth dimension of truth, the metaphysical truth assumed and accepted without a framework for judgment.

Since there is no way that the characteristics leading to artistic emergence can be concretely predetermined, there are no available benchmarks established to justify hypothetical theory. By following characteristics of the naturalistic paradigm for this study, it has been hoped that a set of adequately constructed multiple realities was established. Truth value has been developed from the careful reconstruction of each informant’s path toward artistic emergence through her interaction with contributors to ensure that each has rendered credible accounts of triggers and perceptions leading to artistic emergence.

### **Credibility**

Associated with qualitative inquiry, credibility assumes the role of internal validity, and has been established in this study through careful reconstruction of realities approved by the informants. There are two interconnected activities that established and fortified credibility with this inquiry: prolonged engagement and member checking. A third activity,

persistent observation, was not formally undertaken. Observation within this study related to personal affects and expressive gestures, the viewing of artwork that was created by informants, and details of their creative environments.

### **Prolonged Engagement**

Prolonged engagement within the field of visual art has given the researcher the ability to assess personal recall from informants that might have influenced the scope of the data. It allowed the inquirer to offset these threats, including values or preconceived ideas about what the researcher anticipated throughout the interviewing process. The greatest time spent with informants occurred at the AP level, where convenience enabled a deeper immersion into the environment. Sufficient time was spent with BFA contributors, primarily at home studio environments. Basic environmental factors related to studio and critique details were recalled from the researcher's background and qualified with supplemental questions for informant verification. MFA informants were interviewed within studio environments at the university they attended, with additional time spent within the environment outside of the interviews by the researcher. Engagement also included attendance at critiques and art shows in which MFA informants were participating.

### *Member Checking*

Member checking offered the potential for stronger credibility within this study. It enabled certain informants to validate the accuracy of their individual reconstructions. Informants were given opportunities to provide additional data and clarify misunderstandings about personal experiences that might have arisen during interviews. Information exposed in interviews, thick descriptions, informal observations, research logs, and member checks established the triangulation necessary for stronger credibility.

## **Transferability**

Within naturalistic research, transferability takes the place of external reliability required in empirical studies. Due to the nature of the naturalistic paradigm, the depth of proper thick description can only provide a means for the transferability of further studies of visual artistic emergence. The purposive sampling and a focus on visual artistic emergence established in this inquiry can allow an avenue for further study for those wishing to utilize the findings in other, more empirical studies.

Dependability regarding this study has been assured through the use of an inquiry audit. As the inquiry progressed, the researcher's advisors conducted periodic examinations of methods and processes. Member checking has confirmed that the study finds consistent consensus.

## **Confirmability**

Confirmability is evident through the triangulation of interview data, informal observations, journal entries, and research logs. Components have been subject to individual assessment for credibility consistently through member checks with informants.

## **Questions Directing the Inquiry**

This inquiry was driven by four research questions, which focused on important aspects of artistic emergence. In addition to probing for relevant triggers and shared perceptions among the informants, an inquiry into the development of artistic emergence was also critical. The study also sought to bring to light the impact of the educational environment

and strategies for continued pursuit of artistic endeavors. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What triggers artistic emergence?
2. When does artistic emergence generally occur?
3. What is the relationship between school experience and artistic emergence? and
4. What considerations must be present to perpetuate this passion?

Interview questions were placed into three categories: descriptive, structural, and contrast (see Appendix F). Each section was aligned with the research questions to facilitate the analysis of data. Descriptive inquiry centered on the early experiences and detailed people and environments. Structural questions probed inclusion in visual art groups and recognition. Contrast questions focused on differences between art and other instructors and classroom environments.

### **Preliminary Coding**

Preliminary coding was the first step in the development and definition of the central categories that enabled the researcher to proceed from the descriptive process to development of hypotheses. Coding for this inquiry was established and developed as digitally recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Informants provided detailed responses to descriptive, structural, and contrast questioning strategies (Spradley, 1979) that were constructed by the researcher. These strategies served to open up informants, allowing them to freely recollect and verbally describe important formative aspects beginning with remembrances of their earliest visual arts experiences. Coding was hierarchical as data from interviews, journal entries, and field notes were incorporated into the study.



The initial coding list within this study included 65 codes (see Appendix G) encompassing a broad range of categories that probed facets of the informants' lives as young children, establishing an early baseline for the very beginnings of artistic emergence. Other categories within the preliminary coding were derived from recall of first encounters with art instructors, ages at which they remembered specific creative endeavors and personally notable artists outside the realm of the family. This served to establish the origins of recognition that visual art was an important part in the growth of personal awareness.

Along with this home-centered cluster, initial coding also focused on (a) instructional factors including past and present instructional environments; (b) differences between art and non-art classes; (c) the informant's perception of the importance of involvement in visual arts; and (d) recognition of positive experiential experiences. These were included to determine their effect on the importance of the educational environment on the informants' artistic emergence. Also notable in preliminary coding were: (a) indicators of the differences between art and non-art peer discourse and support; (b) instructor prompting and guidance, and (c) comfort level with art and non-art instructors.

### **Axial Coding**

The preliminary codes were collapsed to create axial coding, and the core categories that pertained most effectively to the research questions in the study. The categories were established by determining the frequencies of the early code clusters. Coding that proved insignificant to the study was retained for potential use. Axial codes comprised five central categories that fit the importance of the inquiry: Self Awareness, Parental Support, Peer Interactions and Support, Instructor Support and Guidance, and Instructional Environment (see Appendix G). These five core categories were utilized to provide the initial theory

needed to address the research questions presented in the study and to generate theories about artistic emergence. These help to frame and describe the details revealed in the findings from each case study. A section detailing the code categories follows the vignettes to provide thick description required in the naturalistic paradigm.

### **Data Collection Process**

Beginning in June of 2007, the foundations for this inquiry were formed. Administrators in the high school where the interviewing was planned to be held were informed of the study, and the confidentiality of the potential informants involved (see Appendix B). Discussions with instructors and professors of prospective students who would be willing to become involved provided a substantial initial group to begin with that gradually dwindled to a solid core as months went by. The instructors provided the names of those students who exhibited a high level of personal motivation (see Appendix D).

In October and November of 2007, AP students received permission slips to participate in the study (see Appendix A). Consent to Participate forms were signed by parents or legal guardians before the interviews took place and were held in a secure file, with copies for parental records being handed to the participants (see Appendix C). BFA informants received the forms in December, 2007, while the MFA level had gotten theirs in March, 2008. Each informant was given a code number as a reference for the sake of confidentiality. Since all contributors were over the age of 18, the Minor Consent Form (see Appendix E) devised for underage informants was not needed in this study.

All interviews were recorded on an Olympus DS 40 Digital Voice Recorder. The recordings were uploaded to a professional transcription service that has a proven record for

confidentiality. The service performs transcription for legal and medical firms in southern Connecticut.

### **AP Interviews**

The first two AP high school informants were interviewed in high school studios where they had created class work in early December, 2007. At the time of the interviews, they were beginning to select work to include in their AP portfolios. These informants had early instructional contact with the researcher at the elementary school level. This had occurred approximately six years before this study was undertaken. Three additional AP informants were interviewed in February, 2008, but one of the interviews was dropped from this study because of the informant's short and unformed responses. Data provided a well-rounded body of information. During interviews and informal observations, informants were able to present the work with which they were involved for their portfolio development. Also, this researcher explored the art room environment.

### **Bachelor of Fine Arts Interviews**

In December, 2007, and January, 2008, interviews with both BFA students took place during winter break from studies. Interviewees provided signed consent forms (see Appendix C). The forms indicated they were seeking voluntary participation in the inquiry and explained the parameters of the study. One of the interviews took place at the home of an informant, and this environment provided the researcher with the benefit of viewing the personal environment and studio space. The home showed indications of the creative input of the informant, such as colors chosen for walls and choices of original artwork hanging on them. Art supplies were evident throughout the parts of the house to which the researcher had

access to observe. At the time of the interview, the informant's siblings were working on art projects. This scene further validated the fact of an artistic home environment.

The second informant was interviewed at the researcher's classroom during a break in the school day. She had arranged to visit her former AP instructor to show personal work in which she was involved at her college. This interview was animated, with the informant excitedly describing her artistic experience.

### **Master of Fine Arts Interviews**

The four MFA students were interviewed in their studio spaces at the college campus. The interviews were arranged during a meeting in late November, 2007, when a list of candidates was generated at a meeting with the department chair of the MFA program and students were present for a critique of their work. Because of previous commitments, the researcher coordinated and conducted the interviews with these informants in February and March of 2008. Despite calls for male students, there were no responses from males on the instructor-supplied list of names offering to participate. Therefore, female informants were interviewed to satisfy the time constraints of the inquiry and to provide adequate data. The studio spaces contained much of the work that the students produced during their immersion in the MFA program, offering insights into the degree of their involvement. While attending the MFA thesis show in April, 2008, the researcher was able to observe three informants and ask additional informal questions to acquire follow-up information concerning plans to continue pursuing the visual arts after college.

### **Limitations of the Study**

By nature, recollection and discourse have assumed inherent flaws. In the case of this inquiry, informants have most probably tended to construct realities that may have been

somewhat altered when recounted in their minds over varying spans of time. This study has taken this into account by using the multiple constructed realities of 10 informants, which realities were shaped by the questions asked of each respondent. The questioning strategies were designed to limit the personal distortions and selectivity sometimes found in naturalistic inquiry.

The series of questions used to gather data for this inquiry also limited to some extent the bias that might have been in the researcher. The question set provided a way for the researcher to stay on course when interviewing informants, and prevent personal perceptions from entering into the data stream. Since the limited number of informants in the sample may have been problematic, the series of questions also provided the structure needed to draw out these data for this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS OF THE INQUIRY**

The results presented in this chapter focus on events and interactions in the informants' lives that propelled them to seek visual art for pleasure or as a potential profession. All of those involved in the inquiry have described commonly perceived events and experiences that triggered their interest in and desire to continue along an artistic path. They have detailed the rich and exciting instructional environments and the peers and teachers inhabiting them. Many contributors have described the motivational constructs that perpetuate their interest for continued creative experiences.

### **Awareness and Support**

#### **Self-Awareness and Family Support**

Among the findings of this study, the role the family plays appeared to be a key trigger in the development of self-awareness as a visual artist, especially at an early age. An example of this support was the informants' unanimous reporting of the retention of childhood artwork. The fact that the family considered artwork to be a treasured object may have contributed to the informants' continued interest in visual art. Numerous instances of recognition for creative accomplishments were reported from elementary school inclusions, Advanced Placement admission, and successful critiques.

#### **Peer Support**

Peer support acted as a triggering factor—primarily at the end of high school and Bachelor's levels, at which times peers are unified by their interest and ability to see things from an artistic perspective. Because of the distance from home on the part of Bachelor of Fine Arts students, peer support seemed to be reported with the most excitement at this level.

Master of Fine Arts students mentioned peers as supporting them artistically with the least frequency, if at all.

### **Instructor Support and Guidance**

There was a shared perception at all levels that visual art instructors were supportive yet remained somewhat distant, preferring their students to find their own way. High school informants said that their instructors offered guidance and backed them up with their decisions concerning colleges that they wished to attend. The informants who were in college-level courses said that their instructors were understanding and approachable. For example, in referring to her high school instructor while in an all-girls school, one informant said that her experiences were like those she perceived at the college level.

### **Environmental Impact**

The informants' statements concerning the routine and environment of the art room itself provided a look at how different these were from those perceived in general classrooms. The art room was a place that each enjoyed spending time in because of the open and student-centered aspect found there. Informants said that they were able to listen to music, work on projects and talk problems over with peers, while in regular classes there was no such freedom. The informants found that the environment was visually stimulating, a characteristic that appeared important to continuing interest. Exemplary artwork displayed in the room acted as feedback to motivate the informants to push their limits with concepts and media.

### **Preliminary Coding**

Preliminary coding is the first step in the development and definition of the central categories that enable the researcher to proceed along the path from the descriptive process

toward the production of theory. Coding for this inquiry was established and developed as digitally recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Informants have provided detailed responses to descriptive and structural questioning strategies (Spradley, 1979) that were constructed by the researcher. The strategy served to open up the informants, allowing them to freely recollect and verbally describe important formative aspects beginning with their earliest visual arts background. Coding was hierarchical as data from interviews, journal entries, and field notes were incorporated into the study.

The initial coding list within this study included 65 codes encompassing a broad range of categories that probed facets of the informants' lives as young children, establishing an early baseline for the very beginnings of artistic emergence. Other categories within the preliminary coding were derived from recall of first encounters with art instructors and ages at which they remembered specific creative endeavors and personally notable artists outside the realm of the family. This served to establish the origins of informants' recognition that visual art was an important part of a growing personal awareness.

Along with this home-centered cluster, initial coding also focused on instructional factors including past and present instructional environments, differences between art and non-art classes, the perceived importance of involvement in visual arts, and recognition of positive experiential experiences. These were included to determine their effect on the importance of the educational environment on the informants. Also notable in preliminary coding were indicators of the differences between art and non-art peer discourse and support, instructor prompting and guidance and comfort level with art and non-art instructors.



## **Axial Coding**

The preliminary codes were collapsed to create axial coding and the core categories that pertained most effectively to the research questions in the study. The categories were established by determining the frequencies of the early code clusters. Coding that proved insignificant to the study was retained for potential use concerning individual informants. Axial codes comprised five central categories that fit the importance of the inquiry: Self Awareness, Parental Support, Peer Interactions and Support, Support and Guidance from Instructors, and Instructional Environment. These five core categories were utilized to provide the initial theory needed to address the research questions presented in the study and generate theories on artistic emergence. These help to frame and describe the details revealed in the findings from each case study. Each of the code categories follows the vignettes to provide thick description needed within the naturalistic paradigm.

### **Informant Vignettes**

The four Advanced Placement (AP) informants contributing to this inquiry comprised a sample of convenience and were all enrolled in one high school in the study area during interviews and data collection. Despite this fact, each informant had varied backgrounds in visual art because of home environments and past experiences. Each respondent had found a different media of choice that he or she was comfortable working in and had a growing awareness that his or her particular skills were possibly worthy of further exploration.

### **AP Students**

#### **AP Student H**

H began her serious interest in art at the high school level and was beginning to focus her attention on photography. She was like many other high school seniors in that the

friendships she developed during her time at school were important to her. She and her friends would often scout out sites around the area in order to obtain interesting photographs. She shared some of her work, 30 to 40 shots taken at an abandoned factory that had been shut down for around 20 years. This researcher had expressed concern for her safety upon hearing the conditions that were present in the buildings.) Her interior shots of the dilapidated factory were intriguing, collapsed ceilings and moss-covered floors. In one room known as “The Bum’s Room,” a predominately brilliant, orange-painted wall was covered with a beautiful graffiti piece. (She and her friends share an interest in well-done graffiti.) The flooring in a large section of the room was missing, presumably collapsed onto the floors below. “I would never go in alone,” she stated. “When I go with friends to take pictures, we watch out for each other and it’s OK.” It was hardly OK, in this researcher’s opinion

Her AP instructor had assessed other media that H was working in and became aware that photography was a medium that H could successfully use to develop a portfolio, opening a door for further exploration. The theme for her AP portfolio was the juxtaposition of old and new. While spending time with this informant, the researcher was able to see the evolution of her development process. She would carefully arrange old, found artifacts with their new counterparts within each photo, making sure that her composition within the camera’s frame was balanced aesthetically. The photos were shot in black and white, and the film was sent out to be professionally developed. The high school where the informant attends eliminated its photography program years back after attributing the illness of an instructor to chemicals used in processing.

H was aware that her compositions and the film development were important for high-quality work. In non-interview conversations related to values of black, white and grey

within the work and depth-of field-focus issues, the informant exhibited an accomplished degree of fluidity on technical matters.

There was a great deal of concern over getting photographs properly developed and back from the processor in time to complete portfolio requirements. Because of other pressing commitments at the time that H was involved in her portfolio preparation, she found it difficult to focus all of her energy on her timeline for execution, so there was a substantial amount of stress present during the time of the interview.

*Self-awareness.* H could not recall the first piece of artwork that she had created either in school or at home. She mentioned that her artistic ability seemed to emanate from her father's side of the family; both father and grandfather were artistic, and she appeared to be proud of the fact that her grandfather's sister, who passed away at an early age, had created a "big sketchbook" of drawings that her grandfather still kept. "On my mom's side, they can't draw a straight line," H remarked.

She went on to say that when she was young, she "wasn't the most artistic person," but she was able to choose her own clothing and decorate her room. "It was always that way.... [I] had guidelines, I guess you could say, but primarily, it was up to me." The informant recollected that a young age she was involved in art in general had little impact "until freshman year, when I really started to be interested in it." The recognition of being included in the National Art Honor Society was something that she said had been special: "You have to have a recommendation from your teacher...you get a little card that says you're in it and you get a tassel when you graduate." The tassel is distinguishing because it is made of many colors, setting apart graduates who have received this honor from the rest.

Further recognition she experienced was getting artwork into the senior exhibition—“a big pastel flower drawing and some smaller work.”

When asked about artists who had an influence on her artistic perception, the informant stated: “I’m not really into all the different artists. I know Van Gogh and Picasso. DaVinci—his stuff is simple, but at the same time it was really detailed.” Art history is not a noteworthy part of the curriculum within this school district, and the artists H recalled were the most frequently referred to at the elementary level.

A negative experience that appeared to shape this informant’s awareness involved a portfolio review at a New England college she had wished to attend. H recalled with a dejected affect that after waiting “for almost two hours, I spent not even 10 minutes with [the portfolio reviewer].” During the time spent in review, H said, the individual “basically told [her] that I was flat and boring, and everything was the same and I wasn’t intriguing. It was kind of crushing because it is something that I do, and I know that everyone has their different styles and taste and everything, but it was just so blatant.” The informant’s choice in using a photographic media in her AP portfolio quite possibly can be considered as a positive outcome to the harsh critique, a fork in the artistic path leading to greater self-awareness.

*Parental support.* H indicated that parental support and feedback were somewhat subtle. “I think they supported me, but not outward, like a ‘That’s great!’ kind of thing, but every year they would get me supplies or something like that just like, to kind of move it forward.” When asked about saving artwork, the informant appeared more animated. “My father saved everything. He has huge boxes up in the attic...boxes and boxes.” She stated that as a parent someday, she would do the same: “Everything is important. It is your kid’s work/”

*Peer interaction and support.* This informant offered important insight for this study although there was not much that she seemed to be able to express. Her statement reflected a strong sense of what artistic peers have in offering support at this level. H states:

I think in an artistic way, you connect with artistic friends more. If you are talking about what you are doing, then they are going to understand you and support you a little bit more because they know what you are talking about. I mean, the other friends, they are still a little supportive, too, and they try to understand, I guess. According to this informant, peers outside of the artistic realm seem to have difficulty conversing or voicing opinion about artistic matters. She remarked: “It’s kind of like two different worlds.”

*Instructor support and guidance.* During her entire educational experience at the high school level, H had taken visual art classes from two instructors. Aside from the three years that she spent with the instructor who was responsible for her AP involvement, among other courses, she had an opportunity to receive instruction with one other teacher whom she did not mention during the interview. In the three-year period between sophomore and senior years, H indicated that guidance most frequently came in the form of instructional feedback. “Every once in a while, she would just come by and say, “Well, this angle has to change just a little bit,” or, ‘Double check this’ and that kind of stuff. That’s it.” When questioned about the differences between other instructors and those involved in visual art education, the informant said, “I think it’s the same kind of thing as like the friends. Its two different levels. Artistic people seem to not get along better but to connect better.”

During prolonged engagement within this environment, it was noted by this researcher that H’s instructor maintained a professional affect that was evident among other teachers at the same level of employment (30 or more) years, connecting in a teacher-student

manner rather than a more personal one that younger teachers often exhibit. The instructor provided support in critiquing work for both general and AP portfolios and guided and recommended colleges that would accept H's style of work.

*Instructional environment.* When questioned about perceived differences between art room and general classroom environments, H appeared to be annoyed with the latter. She said:

Art classes are more focused. People actually want to be there, and I think everyone gets along better in art class. They all have their differences, but they are able to put them aside, kind of, and everyone seems to help each other out if they need it. But in, like, regular classes, its not really that way at all.

In a statement related to support from peers within the art room and not in general class settings, the informant states: "Everyone works together in their own way. If someone is having trouble, oh well, 'does this look great to you? ...what do you think I should do to fix it?' like that kind of stuff."

### **AP Student C**

C always enjoyed art, but never felt that she was particularly talented. Talent within the family, she stated, was "mostly musical." Her high school scheduling did not allow her to begin to take visual art classes until her junior year. She was persuaded by a friend to take an introduction to art course, a prerequisite to prepare for a possible future in graphic design working with computers. There, she felt like an outsider while working with students she considered more talented. She was put on a fast-track for AP by the head of the art department because of the quality of her work. She found that she had a knack for portraiture, a skill that many artists have a particularly hard time developing. It was along this line that

she produced a number of pieces that she was able to synthesize into computer-enhanced work along with the other pieces she had developed for her AP portfolio.

*Self-awareness.* When asked about visually artistic talent in her family, C stated, “There really aren’t any.” She clarified her comment by stating that “most of my family is [musical]” and that she was predisposed to be musical as well. She recalled that the first piece of artwork that was notable to her was a poster hanging in her brother’s room; she was about five years old at the time. “It’s like a café, and there are tables and stuff like that...kind of orangey and yellow.” The informant was referring to a Van Gogh piece. This informant could not remember creating early work or her affect as a child. She said that when she wanted to change her room color, “I made my dad repaint it pink,” though she didn’t say how. She stated that she always wanted to do things for herself and claimed to change her room around “all the time.”

Her realization that she wanted to become involved in visual art came in her junior year due to scheduling conflicts. Her first class in graphic design sparked an interest. She said: “I was talking to [a friend], and she said that I should join in an art class because you need art to go into graphic design, so that is when I really started.”

Recognition for a self-portrait opened the door further, motivating her to do other commissioned work. This informant said that the work of Alex Grey<sup>2</sup> was an influence in her artistic exploration. “I just started liking him because he does the Tool [a band] covers and all that.”

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<sup>2</sup> Alex Grey’s work is composed of fantastically rich patterns and auras which surround detailed human images. The images often include incredibly rendered blood vessels and organs, anatomically arranged beneath a transparent skin.

A negative situation recalled by C was a perceived sense of abandonment during her second semester, the last half of her senior year. She stated: “[My friend] had gym the second half of the year, so I really didn’t know anyone else [in art class]. Occasionally [the other art students] would talk to me, but usually it was like they were all friends and they had been friends for a long time, so I was just kind of there.” When asked how that affected her, she stated, “I think it just kind of made me focus more....”

*Parental support.* Possibly because of her parents’ greater interest in music, their responses appeared to be limited, with the informant focusing on artwork that was saved by her mother. C described this in detail:

We did this sum-I artwork in middle school and we did Starry Night, by Van Gogh, except we cut out the city and we used oil crayons to draw the sky, and then we painted over with watercolor. So, she saved that and she saved one of the things from the elementary school. We painted like a bush and then we crumpled up the other pieces of paper and put that on.

When asked if there was anything that her mother had not saved but that the informant wished she had, C replied: “I always liked making pinch pots [out of clay]. I would have saved all of those.” She stated that a couple of them had been saved.

*Peer interaction and support.* Little was offered by this informant regarding the peer support code. A notable factor was, in C’s opinion, that her friend was responsible for her initial interest in visual art, leading to her commitment to an AP regimen. She described her peer interaction within the art room as being minimal: “I really don’t know anyone else.”

*Instructor support and guidance.* C appeared to have difficulty relating instructor support and guidance when questioned regarding this code. C said: “Sometimes, she just



comes over and like stares at you and you get freaked out. I am like, ‘What am I doing wrong? You can you just tell me this now, so I do not have to...’ [she drifted off]” When questioned about the differences between art and general instructors, C stated: “I think with art they talk to you like you know more because it is just little things that you can correct to do a lot better. But in other classes, like, if you are wrong, you are wrong.”

*Instructional environment.* C described the differences between the visual art environment and those in other classrooms by stating, “It’s more laid back in art.” She continued:

Most of the other classes are Honors and AP, so you have all this work to do, and you have to get it done by this time, and with art, it is just, kind of like, you still have those deadlines, but you only have four things to do.

The informant was speaking of four categories of work that is required in developing an AP portfolio for submission. She appeared to perceive visual art as more relaxing, offering a period in which to prepare for her day. She stated: “I have calculus right after, so I like first period where I can just relax and do what I enjoy doing before I have to go to calculus and really think about what I’m doing.”

### **AP Student K**

K recalled going to a babysitter when she was young, her parents choosing not to send her to a group daycare or preschool program. To pass the time, she and the babysitter would work together on small sculptures and drawings that she remembered she enjoyed making. K stated: “I started staying there when I was born, so as soon as I was able to start gluing and stuff like that.” With the help and encouragement of her school art teacher in the second grade, one of her works was selected for a calendar with a state-wide distribution, and

she remembered that it made her feel good to have it included. Her family was understandably proud.

She stated that art was an “escape” for her, a private place where she could “lose herself.” Her grandmother saw an immediate connection between her husband, the grandfather that she unfortunately had never met but knew through the artwork he had created. Her grandmother offered K continual support and feedback regarding her creative exploration and accompanied her on visits to schools while she showed her admittance portfolio.

*Self-awareness.* K felt sure that she acquired her artistic talent from her father’s side of the family. “I think it definitely came from him,” she said. She recalled that her father’s grandfather was an artist, and that a painting that he had created hanged in her family’s home. K stated: “That one is kind of creepy to me. He just stares at you and his eyes are everywhere. We have a lot of his art everywhere. He died when I was two.” The interviewer focused on the informant’s great-grandfather in order to establish the impact of his influence. K. stated, “Most of his stuff was realistic. A couple of years ago they found a lot of his stuff in a museum and auctioned it off and our whole family went, but we couldn’t buy it.” In addition to her great grandfather, she stated that a cousin on her father’s side was “very good at art.” When asked about her parents, she said, “My mom is not good at all; she really draws stick figures, and my dad is decent—I mean he can draw and stuff.” She continued by adding that after taking high school art classes “he never did anything about it because he went into the Air Force; he never went to college.” She described a large landscape:

The only (other) painting that sticks out in my mind was one that we had ever since I was little in my old house before I moved and it was in the living room. It was a

landscape ... mountains and a river. I am pretty sure it was an oil because we didn't have glass over it and it was textured ... I could feel it. It was there forever until we moved and now I don't know what happened to it. I remember it vividly.

When K was asked to recall the childhood room in the house, she did so in detail:

My ceiling is a cave, so it was like rounded at the top, but where it started to round I had dolphin wallpaper and underneath it was painted pink, and we had sponge-painted blue and green over the pink, and then my bureaus and all my dressers—everything—were all pink and then the knobs were blue and green. Everything was color-coordinated.

This contributor recalled liking her elementary school. K stated: "It was kind of cozy—old-timey." She said that as a young child she was obedient and very shy. K said: "I was pretty much focused in art class. It was my favorite class. I didn't goof off or anything." As mentioned briefly earlier in this vignette, K's creative experience began well before the elementary level. She recalled:

I started staying there when I was born. I went to a babysitter; her name was Joann [and] she had two daughters. I was just there all day and we would always do crafts together. Like, the first thing I ever remember making with them was pasta angels out of little pasta and we used the bow tie pasta as the wings and little bodies. I still have them and still hang them on the [Christmas] tree every year. We made crafts every day.

When questioned about negative experiences related to visual art, this informant offered this response without delay:

Oh, my Dad had a huge issue with me wanting to go to art school.” When asked the reasons that she perceived this, she added, “He thinks because so many schools are cutting budgets and art programs are going out the door and I’m not going to get a good job, blah, blah, blah. It was a long deal, but he finally accepted it that it was what I wanted to do. He knew that’s what would make me happy so he knew there was nothing else.

The researcher asked about how her mother felt; K replied, “She loves it.”

When asked what artists had influenced her work, K indicated that she had made a realization that she had made progress towards a deeper sense of self-awareness as a visual artist. She said:

Probably Georgia O’Keeffe because even pretty much until now I was strictly realism and then looking at her work, it is pretty much realism except it is mixed with expressionism, so I am not really abstract too much, but looking at her (work) made me realize that you can draw a flower without it actually having to be strictly a flower. You know?

While engaged in this research, it was apparent that this informant had made changes to her artwork and began to look at the creative process differently.

*Parental support.* It was not determined during the interview to what extent that K’s input was responsible for her childhood room décor. After the move to her family’s new home, she said, her parents had entrusted both her and her brother to decorate as they wished. She wanted to do more, though: “I asked them to let me decorate the downstairs bathroom.” She continued to fill in details that revealed the length and depth of her parents support through what they had done with her artwork:

Moving into a new house was a great opportunity because we based rooms around my artwork. They always ask me [things] like, ‘Can you paint a picture of [our dog] Foxy?’” We are obsessed with our dog. ‘Oh, get a picture of her for us. What if she dies and we don’t have a picture of her by then?’ I had (created) a woman from last year and that was like their favorite piece ever and it is right there in the living room and the whole room is based on that. It is professionally matted and framed. They have [another] one of mine in their room matted and framed above their bed. I really don’t like that one much, but they do.

When asked about the subject of the piece, K. replied: “Penguins; it’s in ink.” She went on to say that ink was not really her favorite media. This additional recognition at the level of her family supplemented by her earlier recollection of her successful submission for the statewide Long Island Sound calendar competition while in elementary school.

Noteworthy support also came from her paternal grandmother, who had retained some of her father’s artwork. She offered this recollection of an incident that took place when she was very young and apparently hearing the story as she was growing up:

Right before he died, she took me down to Florida where he lived and [told] me she saw a connection between [my great-grandfather and I] that she had never seen before. She knew it was the art thing because I guess we painted eggs together when I was down there. Easter eggs. I don’t remember, so I don’t know what she is talking about. I was young. She goes everywhere with me. She is coming to the art show Tuesday; she has been to every one. She wants to go to portfolio day in Hartford even though I told her that we are going to wait in line for three hours at a time just to see one school, but she wants to go.

*Peer interaction and support.* K's perceptions regarding peer support were related to art and gymnastics, another interest of equal importance to her at this point. The question was centered on the differences between art and non-art peer interaction, but seemed to be relevant:

I think that my friends in art—and I do gymnastics every day—and my friends from gymnastics kind of see the same thing. I don't know if it is because you know you have something in common that opens you up to each other. I don't really know, but it's definitely different. If you're talking to somebody and you don't really know how to describe it, you put it in terms of art or gymnastics, but if you're talking to someone from school you don't really have that relationship with, then it's kind of hard to explain things.

*Instructor support and guidance.* When K was questioned about instructional support, she reported perceived differences between her art instructor and those of her general classes:

I think that art teachers go beyond the class while my other teachers pretty much are strictly in class. When my schedule did not fit a single art class into it, we fixed it. We changed all my classes, and she told me that if I ever needed anything 'to call or e-mail me, blah, blah, blah keep in touch' which I have never done with any of my other teachers. I have never really kept in touch with any teachers other than art [teachers].

*Instructional environment.* K. related aspects of the instructional environment, and her affect within it. She claimed that there was a remarkable difference between the art room environment and the environment in her general classes. The art room is a place she felt at home in. She stated: "I do my assignments. I don't really talk to other people." While

observing her during working periods, this informant balanced her socialization with periods of deep focus. Despite working in a loose and open environment, K had the ability to concentrate on projects and reach effective solutions to problems. When asked to speak about the things that set the two environments apart, she said, “Everyone has to take math, everyone has to take English, but only the people who want to take [visual art do so].” She added that there were personal directions that one can take in the art class:

I think that [it’s] a lot different from other classes because there are guidelines but not really like an assignment. You have to do watercolor, but your subject is your option, and stuff like that. It’s not like [we] do this worksheet and everyone has the same thing. You do your own thing.

The interaction between the instructor and student has an added impact on the atmosphere within the art room as well:

You don’t have to sit there and listen to the teacher. You pretty much learn from your own mistakes in art class. If you mix the wrong color and stuff like that, you have to redo it yourself. It’s not someone sitting up there teaching you what to do; it is a learning experience through yourself.

Another aspect that K relates to the visual stimuli within general classrooms is what was on the wall of those rooms. The room in which this informant spent her time was covered by years of art actually painted on the walls, cabinets, and doors by previous students. Her instructor had been in the room for the past 20 years, and each successive wave of students in her class added to the collection. Rarely were things painted over, and the works stood as exemplars to new students entering the class. Along with this enrichment,

there were instructional prints and posters that changed with each assignment, offering a continual reference for K and others to view for feedback. She stated:

The walls are covered with art work and my other classes are covered with kid's math papers and stuff. It's kind of like no one really wants to look at that other than the kid whose paper it is. When you go into the art room, you look at other peoples art work. It's a lot less strict.

The informant said that the vibe in the art room seemed more conducive to focus and exploration: "It's a lot less tense because they're all doing their own thing. In the classroom, kids are like, 'I don't get this; explain it to me.'"

#### **AP Student M**

M attended local elementary schools but moved away during her first three years at the high school level. While attending an arts-friendly high school elsewhere in Connecticut, she developed an interest in visual art. She recalled how, after finishing her class work for the day, she would often sit and talk with her art instructor. The conversations led her to become involved in an after-school art club in which she was able to work on large murals. She enjoyed researching sources to include in the pieces and worked in teams that painted the projects around the school. She said: "I think [instructors] trust you more in art class. They let you do things like walk around and talk to friends about artwork. You need that." As she developed her AP portfolios, she mentioned that she has a difficult time focusing on what she has to complete. She feels like working on other pieces and has a lot of artwork going at one time.

*Self-awareness.* M stated that there were a few immediate family members who were involved in visual art. In this respondent's case, artistic talent came from her mother's side of



the family. ‘There was a lot of stuff on my Mom’s side. My aunt actually had a showing at Koenig’s, [an art gallery and frame shop]. My other aunt used to be an art teacher.’” When questioned about artistic family members on her father’s side from who she might have gotten her interest in art, she stated:

My dad never really like went into art, but he likes to doodle and stuff and he will do stuff when he is bores. He has hobbies. He likes to look up specs on old guns and stuff and draw them. My mom—no [she did not create artistically].

When pressed to recall any other family members who might have influenced her decision to pursue art, the informant said that she didn’t recall any others.

M recalled that when she was in the third grade, her bedroom had pink walls that she “hated.” However, she added, “It was neat when I was little because my mom cleaned it.” M remembered a horse bedspread and some dog posters and two white dressers.

When she had gotten into high school, she was finally able to change her room. She said: “I got to paint it myself and got to figure out what to do with it. It is bright orange with red Japanese symbols on the wall.” When asked what her parents thought of her choice, she stated, “Yeah, my parents were fine with it, as long as I didn’t get paint on the rug, which I did.”

This informant’s seemed to negatively perceive earlier inclusion into art. She stated: I remember there really wasn’t much art that we did. We did coloring, and when I went into Advanced Art [art enrichment], all we did was take little pieces of wood and stick them together and make little magnets for your fridge.

Her affect at describing this memory was flat and disinterested. She stated: “I just remember that it wasn’t really as much as I thought it would be.” At the middle school level her art involvement appeared to be tainted by shattered expectations as well. She said:

I remember seeing other stuff that people did [while I was waiting to cycle into art class], but when I would have art, [the teacher] was out. I would have a sub and we would do watercolors and coloring books, so it never really worked out.

M started to become more fully involved at the high school level. She had moved out of her childhood school district and attended her first two years of high school in a district with an instructor with whom she “could talk to a lot.” As a freshman, this informant remembered, she “never really had confidence in [her] work, but [she] always had the ‘I can’ hat. If it kept falling off, [she] could put it on [her] desk.”

As a response to questions concerning recognition for visual art, M related her response to Advanced Placement at her previous school; “If I stayed there, I would have been in AP art in my junior year, but when I came here, they wouldn’t allow it so I had to wait.” There was little name dropping when it came to responses regarding artists that influenced her. Instead, she referred to her style of working, and the researcher would assume that she was probably drawn to similar artistic styles. She stated: “I do a lot of realistic stuff, but I find that abstract is attractive as well.” She added, “I will say Salvador Dali. I like Surrealism a lot. I will say that. I kind of like Michelangelo, too—not his sculpture, but his painting on the Sistine Chapel.”

M did not recall any particularly negative situations, but she did state that there was potential for them to occur at critiques. It struck her as a form of constructive criticism that she could use to her benefit:

I don't think it was really much negative, but we would like critique our work after we were done with a project. We put all our stuff up on the wall and we would critique each other's stuff. The entire class and I would take all the negative comments and I would think of how I could fix it next time.

She also shared a negative occurrence with her parents:

When I started [showing an interest in becoming an artist] instead of a veterinarian, they weren't really for it at first. They were like, "Oh, you can't get a career in art; all you can really do is be an art teacher; you can't do other stuff." I won't say I ignored it. It affected me a bit, but then they just said, "Well, whatever you want to do."

*Parental support.* This informant claimed that her parents' support is sometimes blind. She stated, "If I [do] it, they love it, which bothers me sometimes because they are not putting any effort into critiquing me at all—but they are my parents." She said that if she asked them what they felt about her work, they apparently could not respond specifically to what she was looking for. She said: "I will say, 'What about this?' and I will be like, 'I was having trouble with this,' and they would go like, 'Oh, it's beautiful, it's beautiful.'" She went on to say that they saved everything when she was little "because it was cute. I don't have too much stuff, unfortunately. I remember creating things when I was really young." She mentioned going down into her basement and finding stuff that she didn't 'remember making, like a caterpillar made out of egg cartons, you know, little stuff like that."

*Peer interaction and support.* As was evident with the previous AP interviews, responses offered by M seemed to follow the same direction in that they were self-serving. There was an indication that discussion between art and non-art peers were perceived as being different. For example, M said:

People that are involved in art, they will critique it with me with negatives and positives and I will do the same thing with them. Where my other friends are like, ‘Oh, I could never do that, so I think it is amazing.’ It’s never much of a level playing field.

*Instructor support and guidance.* Little was offered regarding this code, possibly because of the switch in district at the high school level. When referring to her early visual art educational experience, she commented: “I had to do it... it was required for art, and I wasn’t really into art because I never really had a good art teacher experience.” She stated that at the high school level in the other district, her instructor “would always talk to [her] and stuff as if she were a teenager as well, which is what [she] loved.” This researcher has had the opportunity to work with the instructor mentioned by M while he was fulfilling requirements for a Master’s degree. The teacher’s youth would present this affect, and she was approachable and knowledgeable about her field. While contributing to this inquiry, M was with an instructor who was well-seasoned and presented an affect different from what she had found so appealing. However, M remained positive in her response, stating “The teacher will walk around and stuff and ask if you need any help, or you can ask the teacher and she will help you.”

*Instructional environment.* Information pertaining to room environments appeared to corroborate the constructions given by the other AP respondents. M stated that the routine in the art room was set up in a way different from most other classes.

Well, you get an assignment for a few weeks and then every single day; you just go straight to work. I like it because in most art classes they allow you to listen to music,

which can help you with your artwork a lot of times. There is not really anything being said.

When asked to expand on how the art period is different aside from routine, the informant added:

I think they trust you a lot more in an art class where like you can pretty much sit wherever you want and they let you do walk around and stuff and let you talk to your friends cause it's art work [as opposed to seat work in regular classes]. You need that. Where in other classes, you have a short leash. They make sure you are doing this or doing that. You can't talk. You can't even whisper or like ask someone for help because sometimes the teacher won't explain it as well and if you ask your friend and you will understand it better, but if they don't allow you to ask your friend, I don't see the point in that.

M continued to add information having to do with the art room's general appearance and a relation to the work that she had done there. The general layout was very different from classrooms that were arranged with rows of seating and the teacher's desk positioned somewhere in a conspicuous place. M stated:

There was this huge area in the middle and I would say, "What is that huge, blank area for?" You find this huge still life in the room, like I mean enormous, like five by five feet and you just walk in and say, "What are we doing?" She would say "Well, you are going to paint a still life today." It is so completely different. There is so much more to do instead of like middle school where you are told what to do, on what size paper, with what media. You are given much more leeway. I love it.

With respect to the structure of the AP regimen, M was asked if there was a hierarchy among those who had accepted to undergo fulfilling the requirements. She stated, “I don’t think so. I think you are given more responsibility because they do trust you to get [the work] in on time.”

### **AP Summary**

Three reasons were considered as being important for selecting the informants for this inquiry. High school students who were enrolled in AP coursework were used because their commitment to submit to the rigors involving AP courses of study placed them well above the average student. The researcher felt that they were possibly the closest to the points at which conscious decisions to follow an artistic path are made by an individual at an age-appropriate, cognizant level. This proximity also seemed closest to the earliest experiences that may have influenced contributors to this study to view art as a means of enjoyment as well as an avenue for creative output.

Contrary to the researcher’s initial assumption, most AP students seemed to become interested in art at a later period in their educational history. Most informants appeared to begin taking a serious interest during their last three years of high school, primarily due to scheduling conflicts. Collectively, most AP informants in the study corroborated this timeframe, which was first thought by the researcher to occur during the transition period between middle and high school. Apparently, this early point--at which the researcher himself emerged as a visual artist—is the point at which only a few individuals find artistic interest to be a strong enough influence. Scheduling also creates a potential setback for those who may wish to pursue art for enjoyment and creative output. This break in the continuity

of art education and the stresses of transition present obstacles to perpetuation at a critical age.

AP-level informants provided limited information specifically regarding artistic emergence, possibly because they were in the process of only beginning to emerge. They provided critical background information corroborating aspects of the shared perceptions that became evident across all educational levels. This level also provided an important foundation for what was to become an enlightening body of information on how important the environment within the high school art room is for the perpetuation of interest in visual art in the future. AP contributors appeared to be at the point at which they could reflect easily on parental and peer interactions, and they related how instructors began to make a positive impact on them by further enabling them to move forward along an artistic path.

At some point between the end of sophomore year through senior year, AP informants in the study—like others who are not involved in the visual arts—come under increasing pressure to choose life paths for the future. The collective AP informant affect during the interviews seemed unsure with regards to their educational futures and apprehensive towards the perceived intensive work involved in the AP portfolio process. There was uneasiness about the choice to pursue art as a career, with some informants coming under pressure from parents about the security of such a choice in their futures. Two informants spoke of particularly negative encounters with portfolio reviews at colleges of their choice, which prompted them to reconsider visual art as a course of study. Instructor involvement appeared to play an important part, paving the way for continued interest.

## **BFA Students**

Both BFA contributors to this inquiry were interviewed while home on winter break from their respective schools. One informant was previously enrolled in an all-girls secondary school, where she received visual art instruction that she recalled as being very similar to a college experience. She recalled the openness and affect of her instructors and access to the studio space as being comparable to her present situation. The second informant had completed her AP requirements at the high school level and had been accepted into the college program at an advanced level. This difference in the structure of their younger family lives was hoped to bring a convergence when constructing their realities for this study through the questions presented to them.

### **BFA Student J**

J is a member of a family deeply involved in the visual arts. Her mother is an art instructor in the local school system, and her father is a designer and builder. When she was younger, she and her two sisters attended a Summerscape visual art program in which they would produce artwork in a variety of media in July. Her mother was an instructor for a number of years within this program before she became an art teacher in a public school. J was educated outside the public schools and attended an all-girls secondary school, and this factor set her apart from all other informants in the study. She said: “My teachers knew a lot. It was really open, a really great environment to learn in.” She recalled “slacking off a little” during her senior year but nevertheless being successful at building an AP portfolio that which focused on the differences in traditional and experimental portraiture. With the body of work, she was accepted into the Rhode Island School of Design, a school famously difficult to get into. She has recently switched into a major focusing on Furniture Design.



*Self-awareness.* When asked to discuss family members who have visual art skills, J mentioned her mother, and referred to her as “our teacher.” She described her mother’s and other family members’ influence thus:

She was good because if we could not sleep at night I would come down and we would both draw or something like that. Even with [my sister] now it is like she is always doing art projects. So, she is really good with the traditional art. My father is good with carpentry and fixing things, so he always brought us along to fix things. My grandmother does a lot of artwork, too. She paints on glass a lot and clothing and makes Christmas ornaments.

When asked which grandmother, she said her “mother’s mother.” After thinking, she added, “My mother’s brother does a lot of watercolors and sells [them]. He does pretty well for himself.” She stated that the family was pretty artistic and open.

J recalled her childhood room as having “really gross wallpaper [that was] pinkish-tan with flowers and little dots on it [with] a ton of stuffed animals, lots of toys. I was in the room with both of my sisters.” The family moved into another home where she was able to have her own space “and that was completely different ... this somewhat crazy stripe [wallpaper].”

J described her involvement in art as beginning very early. She said she attended an elementary school where her classroom teacher would set aside time for the students to do art projects. “I was very well behaved as a child because I grew up with sisters and if you got out of line, they would put you back in line, so I was not a behavior problem.” The informant is the second child of four. Recalling her experience of art in her younger years, she said, “I remember making art mostly in kindergarten and preschool. I do not necessarily remember

[creating artwork] before that.” She said that, when she was young, her father used to bring her sisters and her down to the basement, where she had an opportunity to bang hammers and nails “and build things.” She recalls, “We were always cutting paper when we were little.” The first piece of artwork this informant recalled creating was “in kindergarten making like this apple tree out of just like finger painting; we painted it and put finger-dot apples.” She said:

I remember elementary and middle school was a lot of instruction for the longest time, and you would just wish the teacher would stop talking so much and then you would get down to it and it would be, like, fun, but there was so much instruction earlier on that I felt like I did not want to listen to it. I do not like cookie-cutter [art projects] so much.

Though she did not receive any recognition for her artwork at the elementary level, J reported numerous accomplishments and being recognized for a variety of work at the high school level. She said, “I got a gold portfolio with Scholastic, and two silver awards.” She mentioned that some of her AP work was submitted for these awards. She received a score of 5 on her AP portfolio, a grade reserved for only the best work. She said:

We had this thing called the Orchard Award, and the school will keep certain pieces of your artwork until your five-year reunion, so they frame it and display it around the school. I had three that got cups (Orchard Awards) each year. It’s like a big ceremony.

When asked to describe the work and the media they were executed in, the informant said:

One was an oil painting of the pond. One was a piece that I did; it was actually a piece that I did to try to get into Cooper Union, like a full-body self-portrait. I did not

get in, but I got the piece back, obviously, so, they kept that one, and then they kept the Laocoon's (a plaster cast of a classic Greek piece that students work from in the school's collection) face.

Along with these distinctions, the informant's work was also included in the *Lantern*. She said, "I was editor but, I didn't necessarily choose all the artwork—but I always had a lot of pieces in that, too."

When asked if any artists had come to mind that had an effect on her while she was growing up, she said, "I saw a lot of Monet when I was growing up. I really like Miro—all the little creatures he makes; the little twisty creatures." Other artists were also mentioned, which indicated that J has been taken an interest as she had grown. She said:

I like looking at a lot of graffiti and street art. I like (Robert) Rauschenberg; he's cool.

A lot of the people I go to school with are really good to be around because you get very influenced. My drawing teacher was Thomas Lyon-Mills, and his stuff is really—like he goes down into the catacombs and draws by candlelight, very creepy stuff, but it is really cool.

When questioned about negative experiences that had an influence on her formative aspect as a visual artist, this respondent stated that the development of her high school AP portfolio was one issue that came to mind. She said: "You have to, like, kind of do it on your own. Which, I don't know, I probably would have done better with a little more structure." The researcher asked for the subject content of her portfolio and if the informant had thought it had been a learning experience that she was successful at attempting on her own. She explained:

Yeah, no, I really liked doing the AP because that was when I started getting into the stencils and, like, my huge thing that I did for my AP was, like, stencils verses traditional materials and portraits. So, I did a lot of big faces of my friends, you know, took like thread, and just like monoprints, and just weird stuff, just like fooled around with it. It was completely experimental.

J stated that she had “kind of slacked off a little toward the end of senior year,” resulting in her push to develop the work she described that went into the AP portfolio that enabled her to get into the Rhode Island School of Design. She had originally “put in a lot of older stuff. I had [arranged the slides to a specific criteria for submission] and had done all the paperwork,” but this work was not good enough, according to her advisor. She said:

And, at 11 p.m., I was sleeping over [at the studio] and I think it was like midnight, [and the advisor] came and found me up there and he was like, “I looked at your portfolio; you need to send in different stuff, because you are not going to do too well with that.” So, I went back and made all these pieces and was up until, like 5 a.m. working and then assembling it. My friends helped me forge my mother’s signature<sup>3</sup> for all of it, and then it was entered, and I got a [rare exemplary rating] so it was, like, a huge help.

Discussing negative experiences, she briefly touched on the fact that her father was apprehensive about her choice of visual art as a career choice. She stated: “My father was like, ‘I do not really want to send you to art school; I want you to be an engineer or something.’” When contacting the informant for an informal member-check regarding

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<sup>3</sup> The researcher later discovered the revised portfolio was approved by her mother, who accepted the forgery without being angry at her daughter.

transcription, the informant had changed her major to furniture design, perhaps as a result of this experience.

*Parental support.* J's reflection on fundamental parental support concerned the childhood artwork her parents retained. Her commentary placed a special importance on this retention that has recurred in this study:

My mother saved all of my artwork. Yeah, we have boxes and boxes. Our whole art studio is full of old papers and stuff like that because she uses them as examples in her classroom now. She will find uses and she hangs all this, like weird stuff up. She never throws anything out. She gets ideas from all of it; she goes through it and picks stuff out. I mean, they are not particularly well-organized, but you know.

Outside of the interview, the informant stated that, in her mother's capacity as an elementary art teacher, her mother is inspired by this artwork, often using it to develop new projects for her lesson planning.

The researcher commented on a sled constructed out of wood and painted in a skilled manner with a patina to make it look aged that was located on the porch of the family home.

J commented:

I showed [my father] the plan because he helped me get all the lumber when I came home for Thanksgiving and he [said], "These are the faults with your design," and [showed me] how to make it better. So, there was a lot that I had to figure out on my own once I got back to school, but a lot of it was him. He brought me to the lumber yard to talk to that guy about ways to make it structurally sound even though it was pretty simple.

J revealed evidence of strong parental support as she described their acceptance of the input that she offered when the family had moved to their current home. While interviewing, the researcher had commented on the home's aesthetic appearance. J said, "I helped choose all the colors in the house except for the tin [backsplash].." The color in the kitchen, where most of the interview was conducted, was painted a fresh green with a yellowish undertone that the researcher equated with spring. J said:

We got it and my mother [said], "Oh, I think it's too bright," We put the first swatches down, but we chose one that would match this [stained-glass pendant] light that my mother chose.

She went on to say that all the room colors were "really, really bright," but not unpleasantly bright<sup>4</sup>. J added that "all the daughters got a huge say in how we decorated the house."

*Peer interaction and support.* J reported that peers had offered support and guidance regarding her decision to pursue visual art. She said: "People always regarded me as the artist in a group of friends." While observing this informant's interactions with non-art peers, this researcher noted that J had always presented ideas with an artistic affect, a bit of quirkiness, and a sense of humor that set her apart from the rest of the crowd. In conversations outside of the interview, J revealed that, while with artistic peers, she had engaged in spotting locations and utilizing stencils to create graffiti pieces. Though not embedded with the group or artists, this researcher had an opportunity to observe evidence of graffiti that the informant had created. The graffiti would attest to the cooperation among friends in initiating and completing artwork without reprisal.

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<sup>4</sup> The researcher can attest to this fact.

J thought back on the differences in the conversations between art and non-art peers. She reflected:

Well, when friends who are involved in visual art go to museums, [they] critique the work and talk about it in artistic terms. The other people [will say], “Oh, I like that color.” So, I think people involved in visual art have a way of seeing what is around them [that is different from the way of] people who just aren’t as interested in visual art. Because all our paintings you look at and then you do not really see anything until you look for negative space shapes and stuff like that, and then it’s like a whole different world opens up, but most people cannot see that. They will not take the time to look for it. So, I mean, especially being at RISD and then coming home, there is a huge difference in conversations that you have.

*Instructor support and guidance.* As reported earlier, this informant’s secondary school experience was very different from that of other informants in this study; J boarded at Westover, an all-girls school in Middlebury, Connecticut. Consequently, her instructors were available on a continual basis if she needed them, and many resided on-campus. As a result, she related a different experience with regard to her earlier educational experiences. She recalled her art teacher from high school experience in this way:

I really liked my teacher. He was my advisor for all four years. They were faculty members and stuff, so it was, like, hard work and you always had a lot of homework, too, and it was very traditional with him, but he was a lot of fun. There was one class that I took that was, like, oil painting and that was the spring [semester], so for the whole term we went over to the Westover Pond and painted the pond. My teacher

knew a lot—especially about measuring and traditional skills because he was a really good artist, and it was good to learn from someone who was really good.

When questioned about perceived differences between her visual art and other instructors at the high school level, J added:

They were different. I have a really great relationship with [my art teacher.] He taught me most of the technical stuff I know and ways of speaking about art and just getting into random things. Like old cars. We would always Google those for hours and hours and just talk. I had that with other teachers, too, but I felt like I connected with my art teacher a lot more than I did with other teachers. I did have a good relationship with my calculus teacher and stuff.

J reflected on the support that was offered at Westover. She said:

I kind of showed up on Saturday mornings a lot of times because I have trouble getting up and he didn't care. The studio was open, and we were able to go there and work when we wanted. People lived above [the studios], but we knew all the teachers by first names. If I was doing work [late], [my art teacher] would [say], "I am sorry you are still here. I am going to bed, but it's no problem." It was a great environment.

*Instructional environment.* J shared her recollections of her high school instructional environment. She explained that she had "obviously a different schedule from a public high school. It was really open, just like a great environment to learn." She went on to describe how her day had been structured:

We had classes all day that went up until a little bit after 1 p.m. [Between] 1 p.m. and 2:10 p.m. was when people would sing—they would do glee period. And then, 2:10 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. was arts period and then after that was sports period....I did not sing



or do anything musical, so I had a break and then I could go to art. We had arts twice a week and then on Saturday morning for that period of time and then [we would] go do sports. Also, there were times, like for AP, we had to meet during the school day, just like a Friday morning or something, and look at slides of what you need to do. She added, “All the slide shows about AP were just so boring, and I didn’t like the teacher as much [as I liked the art teacher]. I was just, like, ‘Shut up.’ So, I started to get less and less excited about it.”

This informant reported that the visual art environment and general classes at the high school level “were completely different.” She added, “They were in completely different buildings. The art room had a lot of easels, open space, light. It was just like a traditional studio space, which I was lucky to have. There weren’t tables or anything.” General class rooms had “chalkboards all the way around. There weren’t desks, ever, or if there were desks, they were all put into a circle. I had pretty small classes.”

With regard to her visual arts environment at the college level, J stated that the routine was intensive:

Each one of my art classes was very different, depending on the media, but a typical art class, like a drawing class, [would be] an 8-hour class. You are on your feet the whole time. It’s a lot of figure drawing with just charcoal and really big pieces of newsprint. Sometimes a new perspective, but basically you work for eight hours. She added that “we get an hour for lunch, but it’s like straight drawing the whole time. Then it’s a lot of critique; some days it’s all critique. Then you have a ton of homework.” This informant did not contribute any data regarding the specifics of the instructional environment at RISD.

## **BFA Student S**

S attends The Art Institute of Boston, where she is pursuing a degree in photography. Her excitement and enthusiasm for the subject became obvious as she described the work done by some of her favorite contemporary photographers. She stated: “I’m drawn more to a documentary style of photography [that is] somewhat controversial. I’ve always been drawn to that. Sally Mann, Diane Arbus—anything [controversial] made beautiful.” Her fluent description of the details regarding her preference for photographic filters and paper choices further revealed her passion. Informant S was the daughter of divorced parents; she stated that she received ongoing support from her mother. Her mother has questioned her about her field of study, and S has become something of an instructor, explaining the use of filters and film types to her mother as her mother, in turn, begins to learn about photography and composition through her daughter’s personal growth. Further, S said instructors continually have reassured her and alleviated the stresses of shooting schedules and deadlines for course work.

*Self-awareness.* S said that “there isn’t anyone” in her family that she knew of who was involved in the visual arts. Nor could she recall any artwork that influenced her when she was very young. She said: “I know my grandma had a lot of photos up—tons of photos. She had eight kids, so that was part of it.” She stated that her grandmother had told her that the grandfather she never knew “used to do the paint-by-the-numbers thing all the time. But, my cousin sings in performing arts. Other than that, I’m the only one who does visual art.”

This informant said that when she was a child, she lived in an apartment with her mother and grandmother. She said, “I slept in mom’s room. It was weird because I really

didn't have my own room until I was about 10." S recalled many visually stimulating accessories that were in her room:

I had a pink Barbie beanbag chair and a spongy phone. It was foam and it was multi-colored...with a flower on the top. I want to say I had posters up, but I'm not really sure about that. My room was a mess all the time. And then, I had this little desk thing; it was like, one of those Playmate desk things. It was plastic. It was blue, yellow and red, and I would sit and draw at it all the time.

She added, "I lived in an apartment and had to have the walls white. Tape was my best friend. I'd put up all these magazine pictures on the wall." When questioned about the age at which she could pick out her own clothes, she said:

I remember I was little, [in] first or second grade. I was obsessed with the whole hippie thing. My mom was awesome about that. I would cut my own hair all the time. My mom would just shake her head and say, "Come on, we have to go get this fixed."

S reported that she was "pretty quiet" in elementary school, and was "scared about everything about everything happening," though she didn't explain what she meant. She recalled her elementary art teacher as being nice. The teacher "would ask a ton of questions all the time. [He'd ask], 'Is this OK?', 'Does this look great?'" When someone [else] did well, I got a little jealous."

Asked about her inclusion in a visual art group, S related her awareness to more current situations rather than to an earlier age. She hadn't started to take visual art seriously, she said, until "probably the middle of her sophomore year, and then junior year. I buckled down, and then in senior year I was going crazy trying to get my [AP] portfolio done." As a BFA-level student, this informant stated that being included in a visual arts program of study

was “awesome.” She went on to say, “It’s great because everyone is stressing out and you complain about everything, and we are all on the same page about it.” The researcher mentioned that the stress and newness of the situation appeared to have brought her into the group. “I would say it’s like a family,” she added.

As far as personal recognition for work done in the visual arts, S reported that she received a “decent” scholarship for her portfolio in high school and that she had. She had also been chosen for art enrichment, “that special art thing in middle school.” When the researcher asked when she started to take an interest in photography as a media, S replied:

I really do not know. I have always been fascinated with it. The easiest way for me to get my hands on photography was [to go] through high-end fashion magazines because I found them amazing. If you go, like, through [fashion designer] Versace and stuff like that, [you find] these art-style fashion photographs. I would buy [all the magazines] and go through them, and be like, “This is so cool!” I wanted to do that.

Artists whose work influenced this informant included Vincent Van Gough and Salvador Dali. “I love Dali,” she said. When asked to consider any influences that might have affected her personal style, this informant indicated an awareness of a number of photographers who played a part in shaping her self-awareness. S exhibited a great deal of excitement as she named those who interested her:

Robert and Shana Parke Harrison are, hands-down, my favorites. The guy is crazy. He makes his own backgrounds, like straight up. I do not know how he does it. He does all self-portraits and they are the most beautiful self-portraits that I have ever seen in my life. They are absolutely gorgeous. And Walker Evans and Eugenia Jay,

who was his mentor. And Sally Mann<sup>5</sup>; her kids are all, like, in therapy and stuff now.

And another one, I forgot her name<sup>6</sup>; she did all the transvestites and drag queens.

Just pretty much anyone who is like, somewhat controversial, because I am more into a documentary style of photography. I have always been drawn to that.

In responding to questions concerning negative experiences that S encountered, she was quick to reply that one of her first portfolio reviews was harsh. She said, “The guy made me cry.” She explained:

I showed him my work. I have a really weird style when I’m drawing. I am into making different kinds of lines, like I don’t do shading, I do squiggles and stuff like that and make different marks. And he was a design teacher, so he was more precise about everything. He [said]. “This is messy,” and [he’d] go through and say, “This is messy, this is messy.” I was, like, “Stop!” When I went for my AIB [Art Institute of Boston] portfolio review, they were like “This is so good.”

S chose to go to AIB to pursue her course of studies in photography, and, judging from her affect, apparently enjoys the city. During conversations outside of the interview, she said that there was a lot to do.

*Parental support.* This informant reported that her mother has been “wicked supportive.” Of her childhood artwork, she stated, “My mom ended up saving everything.” When the researcher asked her to expand on this remark, S continued,

Everything. She has some things hung up on the refrigerator, so like, she is crazy.

Like, the 25 dogs—you do the 2 and the 5 and make a dog out of it. It’s on the fridge

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<sup>5</sup> Sally Mann would photograph her young children nude and was considered by some who were not sensitive to her style of work to be somewhat pornographic.

<sup>6</sup> Diane Arbus.

right now. [My mother kept] everything from my senior portfolio, which is awesome because I worked my ass off for it. [Also], I actually did something for her, a drawing with pastels. She saves really random things that mean more to her than they do to me.

When the researcher commented on how good he thought it must have felt to have her mother do this, informant s said the work showed “how [she] grew as an artist.”

S also mentioned instances in which her mother had indicated her pride and a desire to understand more about this informant’s interests. S mentioned that her mother would “tell everyone about [what she was doing at school]. She would [say things like], ‘S had her crit today.’ And they would say, ‘Her what?’ It’s so funny because she tries to understand, but she cannot.”

*Peer interaction and support.* S identified some instances in which peer support played an important part in her college experience. As indicated earlier, critique experiences play a stressful but important part in a visual arts education. This contributor revealed:

It is an open critique, so everyone in the class could say whatever they want, and they give awesome feedback. You can be very open in it. I was frustrated for three out of four months in school this semester because of my artwork, and everyone was really supportive about it, which was really cool. [You could say, “I hate this; this sucks. I hate everything about it!”], and everyone [will respond], “No. It’s OK; just do this instead.”

When questioned about difficulties that arose when she first started to become involved with a new set of peers in that environment, S said:

You put [your pieces] up, and for the first couple of classes we could not say anything about our own work until everyone was done speaking. [The instructor] would ask questions about [whether or not] they were right, or if it had meaning behind it, which was good because it helped out a lot. You go to college and nobody knows you. It was nice just having them saying whatever and you just responded, “Yeah, that’s about right. I was going for this, but got this instead.

She added some information about her peer affect in class:

Everyone in my classes was really close and we talked to each other all the time. It was really nice because if you freak out, you could be like, “Let’s go somewhere.” We lived in Boston, so we would just walk around real quick and then come back.

Peer support extended outside of class was an apparently important factor for this informant, possibly because of her distance from home. Her peer group seemed to offer an outlet for stress (as revealed earlier) and provided companionship by being linked through a common bond:

It is nice because you have a bunch of friends in different majors so they all have different [points of view about] photography. One of my friends would say, “This isn’t balanced,” or “Your contrast is off a little bit,” but they would see it differently [from the way] a photo major would, which is cool. And the same thing with me. I have a fine arts background, so I would tell them, “Oh, you should do this instead,” [or] “If it was a photo, I would do this.” It just helps out a lot because they are your age.

S mentioned the patience and support of her roommate:

My roommate, my poor roommate. I felt so bad. I was stressed out I would be up until like three in the morning figuring out which ones I was going to put in [for my final critiques] and then [I would switch] them and [then I would] back to them. Then I'd get up at eight to do the same thing again. And she was like, "You need to calm down; just go to bed."

When asked to consider the differences between art and non-art peer conversations, S stated, "You just see things completely different when you are more visual. Everything. Everything is different." She recalled this experience:

I'm watching a movie the other night and the color was off and I was freaking out. I could not watch the movie because the color was off. The kid I was with had no idea what I was talking about. And, [I said], "Look at that! It's not right. It's sienna, it's magenta." And he [replied], "Its fine." [I said], "No, it's not!" Later, I called a friend [who is a visual art student] and asked, "Did you see this movie? The color's off." [My friend said], "I noticed that, too!" [I said,], "Thank God!" It is annoying to my friends who don't understand it. I have a good friend who is a political science major, and I like politics. We just see things so differently because I am more visual than [she is].

*Instructor support and guidance.* Contributions to this coding category were provided by this informant, becoming evident during her ill-fated high school portfolio interview that was previously detailed in this interview. S recalled, "My AP teacher called and [said], 'One of your teachers [doing the interviews] made my student cry.' Then she made me buy a bunch of apples and draw them."



At the college level, S reported that her instructors have been very understanding and have provided a cushion for the rigors involved with class work and critiques. She felt that she could be herself with her instructors. She explained:

I am more open with my art and photo teachers. I would go to my teacher and flip out and say, “I cannot do [photography]. I am changing my major.” For a month straight, I wanted to change my major. I [would say], “I can draw. I’m changing my major to fine arts.”

After she expressed herself in this candid way, her instructor persuaded her to stay the course. S said that her instructors were available for consultation anytime would respond promptly to her e-mail messages. They provided support by scheduling meeting times, and S said she felt this was “just really nice.”

Part of the reason for this understanding seems to be the fact that her instructors are experienced in their field. S provided some details about the qualifications behind her teachers at this level:

All of my teachers are working artists. One of my teachers worked for Ralph Lauren and Nautica [design houses] and did design work for them. It’s just nice knowing that they went through the same things. They know what it’s like to freak out when a lens breaks or when you run out of paper. They know how tragic it is, because you are [upset] that is more money [you] need to spend, and photo [supplies are] really expensive. They are just really cool about it. They will sit you down and [say], “This isn’t too bad. You’ll be OK. Get it together.” I would have conversations with my drawing teacher all the

time. I went to her show the night that it opened, and then we talked about it.

She was very open. All my teachers are very open.

S offered an idea of what one of her teachers would present in the photography lab class to guide and instruct her in her field of study:

She would lecture about [a topic], whether it would be lenses or flashes, or different styles of photography—documentary, commercial, or whatever. Then we would have lab time. My classes are for six hours. Sometimes in our class, she would lecture, and then she'd bring us to galleries, which was really cool.

When asked if her other instructors from academic subjects seemed to be as open, her perception remained the same that of the other informants. She said, “You are close to your teachers. You have a personal relationship with them.” She explained with this example:

The teacher I had for English went to Lesley. My school is affiliated with another school. It's an arts school and a liberal arts school. She understood the whole fact about artists and how they work. She went there for six years and got her Master's there, too. We could talk to her about whatever, and when we would be sitting there with hands over our faces and everything, and she would [say], “Are you OK?” I would [say], “I'm fine, it's just Crit Week.”

The researcher asked if other instructors had the same understanding about the work that was expected of her. S responded, “To an extent they are. They understand as long as you get the work in.” Regarding long-term projects, the informants stated that her instructors will often extend the deadlines. She added, “With my lab class, we would just go in after and she would say ‘If you can finish it during class, then do it.’”

*Instructional environment.* S offered little in the way of description about the structure of the instructional environments that she frequented. During the time this researcher spent in similar facilities, he found that the environment can be rich with the smells of photo processing and can have a mysterious quality, especially within the area of the darkrooms. There, special rules are always in force, with each student working within a room in which the light is always red so that valuable film is not destroyed.

S described the visual art routine as being split between instruction and critique. She said: “We had [photography] twice a week, so [lecture and instruction] on Tuesdays and Thursday was a critique. Every Thursday was a critique, which was good, because [we] got a lot of awesome feedback.’

S reported on other subjects in terms of the routine involved rather than in terms of the structure of the environment. She said, “[In] general education classes like English, [the instructor] knew most of us were AIB students and [she] would make it so that we would not be stressed out all the time and we could focus on our art classes. My shortest art class was three hours. I had an art history class, but it was an hour and a half twice a week.” This informant offered details about the differences between general and visual art environments with regard to routine:

[In my] English and art history classes, you sit down, you listen, and you write notes. You take tests. I had two photo classes and I had a drawing class, and we were able to speak about everything. We could give our opinion on everything, ask questions. Our teachers were always awesome about long classes. They would [say], “Alright, take a break; this is a six-hour class, and you need it.”

## **BFA Summary**

Of all the informants in the study, the BFA-level students showed the most excitement about having chosen the path toward a career in the visual arts. They also showed the most excitement about their interviews with this researcher. Their collective affect during the interview was most animated as they profusely described new experiences and stresses encountered in their coursework. They showed little or no apprehension about the future or about the choice they had made to become visual artists. The newness of being fully empowered to experience life outside of parental boundaries quite possibly added to their excitement during the interviews. There seemed to be an unadulterated freshness in all of their responses. They were able to freely describe in detail important aspects of their earliest and most current educational environments that seemed optimal for positive experiences related to their artistic emergence. They were also able to reflect on their artistic process and modifications to works in progress as well as the factors causing them to make choices in and stylistic changes to their work.

At the BFA level, it was evident from data gathered through the interviews and field notes that the continuance of support and understanding of instructors and peers which had begun as high school students were of critical importance

Aside from earlier positive support by parents and family members, it appeared that the ability to rely on these instructors and friends involved in visual art to supply needed feedback acted to initiate a degree of perpetuation. The positive experiences at this level kept the process of creation and achievement moving forward. BFA informants also related increasing and more mature factors relating to stress as a negative factor and the positive outcomes initiated by peers, instructors and strong personal experiential backgrounds that led

them to surmount it. Informants also appeared to have a deeper realization that instructors were more knowledgeable and approachable.

The informant at this level who attended schools outside of public education described her educational environment in her secondary classes as being similar to that of her college experience (open room, greater freedom in choices for class work, comfortable dialog with instructors) now that she was immersed in classes at the college level. This open environment in the art room had been one of the factors that seemed to be of noteworthy importance mentioned by AP informants while in high school.

### **MFA Students**

The four MFA contributors to the study were first and second year students in a recently accredited program at a local state university. The all-female sample came from diverse family backgrounds and showed variety in the fact that some resided in different states when not at the school. The informants were enrolled in illustration and landscape degree courses and exhibited the high degree of skill in their media that one would expect for them to be accepted into a high quality program.

#### **MFA Student A**

A is in the second year of her studies and is readying a body of work for her senior thesis show. She recalls that she was in the eighth grade when she realized that visual art was a path she wanted to take. A stated: “I had a bookshelf that was full of science fiction and fantasy novels and art books, and I had it organized by the authors’ last names and the titles. It was the only organized part of my room.” Her mother, she added, was a librarian “for a long time, but where she worked was located close to art classes in college. She still wants to be an artist.” When asked about her days as a student in high school and if she felt as if she

was part of a special group because of her involvement in visual art, she stated, “No, not really. Actually, my friends tended to be the geeks. I never really had any close friends until now.”

Her current body of work, which has been two years in development, is a set of illustrations that will accompany a children’s book she is authoring. In it, a green central character and his companions of many bright colors travel to places reaching out to all they meet, teaching friendship and acceptance.

*Self-awareness.* Informant A reported that she had some artistically talented people within her family. She said: “My mom...still wants to be an artist. My grandfather on my father’s side was a sign painter, but he was an artist, too. He passed away before I was born, but when I saw his work, I couldn’t help but become artistic. My dad is a musician, too.”

This informant recalled her room at around the age of 12, mentioning that it changed at different ages as she was growing up. In addition to the orderly bookshelf, she said:

I had posters of unicorns on my wall. I really love Victorian stuff, [too]. I had pictures of girls playing violins in frilly dresses. I also shared a room with my sister, so I had my half to decorate and she had her half. She was more into hot pink and Barbie.

Aside from her memory of the artwork in her room, A exhibited some difficulty recalling a specific piece of artwork at an early age, perhaps because of the rich visual quality of her early life. A said:

My mom had tons of art books lying around, [but] I really remember the *Berenstain Bears* [illustrations]. It’s probably the first, really. I know that’s not fine art, but my mom had a painting by a professor that I later studied with at a college she worked at. It had this lady lying on a white thing with figures, kind of celestials over her.

A recalled her art teacher when she was a child. She said: “I had her from kindergarten through third grade; she helped me make a mask out of half a milk jug and *papier mache*.” She admitted to an unremarkable artist in the elementary grades. She said; “Actually, I do not think my art was good back then.”

A mentioned that she recalled her sister had won a prize when she was in elementary school. She herself had a painting accepted for a contest in sixth grade. The piece was painted onto a window in her town for Halloween. When asked about artists who influenced her work, she mentioned an early liking for Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a Pre-Raphaelite painter, on whose work she had based a design for a window painting while in high school. She said: “I worked very hard on the design to be submitted, but it didn’t make it onto the window. I realized that you don’t win everything.” This was the only reference to negative experience that this informant offered.

Other artists having an influence on A’s work were, understandably, 20<sup>th</sup> Century illustrators. She said:

Well, Norman Rockwell is huge. I grew up in the town next to where he worked in and [I] worked at the museum for about three years. So, it was wonderful being [around the work of] a great illustrator every day. Also, Tom Kidd—he’s an illustrator and very much alive. I actually interned with him and he helped me a lot with developing this style here. Also, James Gurney. I do not know if you have heard of the book series *Dinotopia*? He wrote and illustrated all of those. He does a lot of fantasy covers. This guy’s fantastic. I just wish I could paint like any of these people.

While spending time in her studio space, this researcher was drawn to artwork that A had displayed on the walls. The work was highly detailed and was rendered at a professional

level, providing evidence that A had successfully emerged as a visual artist. Discussing them, A said:

These actually took collectively the last two years to do. The first couple of months were just sketches. They are for a children's book. Well, actually, it is about this character here. Each of the countries is divided by color. Everything in a particular country is a [different] color. It's about accepting differences. I'm writing it myself. She added that she worked as an artist at a professional level. She said: "I was also an assistant teacher, but I would do the assignments along with the class."

*Parental support.* A smiled when questioned about work she had created that was saved by her parents. She said: "Actually, they did pretty well; they hardly throw anything out. I'll be cleaning up and come across something I drew. It is very interesting to just go back and see what you created." When asked if looking back at her formative artwork had given her some sort of an anchor, she added, "Yeah. Actually, my dad kept my very first illustrated book I did at school [when I was young]. He wrote down the words. It was about a bunny and an old man. It was really cool to see this almost abstract-looking bunny rabbit." A said she believed she was in the eighth grade when she knew she wanted to be an artist.

*Peer interaction and support.* A offered little in response to this category of coding. A did, however, have some comments that were of interest to this inquiry. While in high school, this informant never felt as though she was part of a group that was unified by visual art. She said: "Actually, my friends tended to be geeks, and I knew the other kids who were artists, but I never really had any close artist friends until now." She added that while she was in art classes, she "would feel camaraderie with the other students but did not hang out much



outside of the studio. But here while you are working, it's different. You hang out all the time."

A perceived the following differences between art and non-art peers, A stated, "Friends who are not so much involved in art talk about things like the latest movies. As I said, I did not really have many friends who were also interested in art."

*Instructor support and guidance.* A recalled an instructor from her elementary school days who stays in touch and still supports her. A said: "Actually, I had lunch with my first-grade teacher. I brought pieces for her to see. She was happy." This teacher also attended A's undergraduate art show. With regard to other instructors, this informant said: "I usually got along with most teachers that I remembered."

A stated that at the MFA level support from her instructors came from a different perspective than when she was younger. She said: "What is surprising is that teachers will recommend doing projects not necessarily related to your main project just to [help you] keep yourself loose so you don't get too mired in what you are doing at the moment." She said that one of her assignments was to make a jazz poster and added that this was unlike her usual work. A said, "My teacher actually recommended at the beginning of the year that I work in the style of Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism, which are the polar opposite of what I usually do."

*Instructional environment.* During the MFA interviews at the university, the researcher noted that the studio spaces in which the informants worked in were approximately 10 by 12 feet. They were clustered into groups of four or five spaces off a short hallway with a larger space available for group meetings and critiques. The space in which A worked was behind a wall adjacent to the large group space and had no window of

its own. This was to her benefit, providing more wall space on which to hang her small, highly detailed work.

In discussing the space with the informant during the interview, A replied, “This is one of three studio spaces in the program, but they are all about the same size. It’s nice to be able to go into a big space to look at your art from a distance. The only down side is that all the meetings and critiques are here, too. So there’s the noise level.”

Within the instructional environment at the MFA level, A reported that routine is dependent upon one’s drive to do the work. She said: “We can pretty much come in any time the school is open. I have a card key, and the other students who have access to their spaces have keys. It is a little more secure and [the door] locks behind [us].”

This informant described how the coursework is established:

From an illustration point of view, the MFA department has the syllabus and have a set number of projects and they will be fully outlined in the syllabus. So, usually they are fairly loose so you can really pick out your own direction you can go in. As you are working on your projects, the teacher usually lets you choose the direction you want to go in.

A described differences between academic and art classes as being “both focused but very different in aim. You are kind of accessing a part of your pain. Students who usually do well in academic courses may not really do as well in art class and vice versa.”

### **MFA Student G**

G is working toward an MFA in painting after previously receiving a Bachelor’s degree in psychology. She was developing an impressive body of landscape paintings that had a nuclear power plant as a central theme. In them, the plant and its red-and-white striped

stack were reflected in a body of water stretching across the foreground. Her father, a nuclear engineer and inventor, had passed away only months before the interview. She stated that she had done the work “in grief.” She said, “I worked out the grief. I went outside and started to paint the view across the harbor.” Each of the pieces had a horizontal, cross-like composition. When this was pointed out by the researcher, G said “Thank you for noticing that”.

Her studio space showed evidence of other avenues of exploration: artwork with a variety of themes including studies for urban landscapes and an accompanying still-life that included gasoline pump hoses. She explained the need to continually experiment with imagery, stepping back from time to time to assess what she had done.

*Self-awareness.* G said she was adopted and therefore never knew if her parents “were skilled or artistic.” She had no idea whether there was any biological impact on her artistic abilities. She pointed out that her adoptive father was artistic “in a sense.” She said: “He was a nuclear engineer and an inventor. I would see his models’ we’d use them as doorstops in our house.”

When asked about any artistic stimuli that may have been present in her bedroom in her early childhood home, this informant stated:

I had a play kitchen in my room. I was about six. I shared a room with my sister, and she had it decorated the way she wanted, but after I was able to have my own room, that changed. My grandfather moved in with us, so my mother gave my room to him so that he could have a space for himself. She moved me in with my sister, and my sister and I did not get along that well. So I ended up living in the family room until she moved out. I was probably eight or nine. My sister was eight years older than I. I

was cold, so I would sleep by the wood stove. My mother was, like, “you have to have a room”, so she turned the family room kind of into that. I had white furniture with gold trim and scrolls. That room was more mature.

The researcher asked G if she had been able to add personal touches to the room once she was established. Informant G said: “I had a dresser and little glass animals. My mother knew somebody who would make them and we would get them.”

When asked about being involved in visual art at a young age, G said, “Yeah, I was into it. It was the best.” She mentioned that she started to become involved in visual art in third grade and always painted and drew. She stated that she “won something when [she] was young.” She added, “I haven’t won anything now, but I’ve made it into a few group shows.”

This informant mentioned that she felt influenced by the work of Vincent Van Gogh. She said: “I have the same birthday as Vincent Van Gogh and when I was, like, eight, I found that out. So he kind of became my interest. Seeing his pieces has a strong impact on me. I actually saw his sunflower piece this weekend.”

G described the death of her father as a negative experience that prompted the development of the work that the researcher observed while engaged with this informant. G said: “My father thought that I should have gotten into something else. I went to college for the first time because I wanted to study art and he [responded], ‘What, are you crazy? It is so common!’” As a result, she subsequently attended college and received a Bachelor’s degree in psychology.

In addition to the preponderance of work related to the theme of a nuclear power plant seen across a body of water on the walls of her studio were pieces of a more diverse

nature. Discussing this variety, she explained that her approach to subjects grew out of a negative experience:

I had a conflict junior year. I started to be classically driven. I made myself work with different images. This year, I'm shelving everything as I go. Basically, I try to keep open about new ideas, just save them, and eventually show it. I do not have space to really focus, plus the financing or capital to make a large body of work in different styles.

*Parental support.* G made no mention of artwork that her parents had been retained when she was a child. There was a small indulgence, though. She said: "I picked out the wall colors. She finally wallpapered" Discussing creative freedom at home, G added: "My parents were kind of conservative, but I remember being able to wear what I wanted. I do not remember really wanting to [stand out]. I was kind of shy in a way."

Outside of the interview, G mentioned that she was able to switch careers, attending four years of college to receive a degree in psychology, then returning to follow her interest in visual art at Lyme Academy.

*Peer interaction and support.* This informant offered very little when questioned about peer interaction and support. However, this researcher was able to informally observe G conversing in studio situations with other colleagues. The interactions appeared comfortable and pleasant. She remarked that she enjoyed working in groups.

*Instructor support and guidance.* G felt that her early education was lacking in respect to visual art. She said: "Up until high school, I felt that it was really bad." She indicated she has received her instructor's support in the MFA program, however. G said: "She's really well-developed, intuitive." Outside the interview, G stated that the instructor

effectively moderates the critiques and subtly pushes the students in the program to “find their own voice” when it comes to their work.

*Instructional environment.* This researcher observed that G’s studio space was located in another section of the visual arts area. There was no large space associated with the small studios in this area. Though this informant’s personal space contained a window and seemed a bit larger than the other niches, G contributed no comments concerning this coding category.

### **MFA Student T**

T is a landscape major whose grandfather was an accomplished Black folk artist. In fact, T said, “There was an auction of his work that was held by a museum, but the pieces were too expensive for us to buy.” She recalled the further loss of earlier work to dampness and mold and remembered always looking forward to art throughout her earlier school career. “I had a close very connection [to my teachers] because they were like my mothers and fathers. They raised me into what I am today.”

She said that she liked to spend time “in the woods” where she lives as a source of inspiration. She explained: “I see the wood as a metaphor for later [in life] because you do not know what lies ahead; you cannot be scared you’ve got to move forward.” Her current work contains subtle lines of Scripture brushed into the paint among the tree branches, and these words are evident only when the right lighting brings them into view. The work, she commented, was done at a “transition point [in her life] after a very hard year.” The work was exhibited in her senior thesis show.

*Self-awareness.* T was quick to point out that there was great sensitivity within her family regarding visual art. She recalled seeing her great-great-grandfather's artwork when she was 10. She said:

My great-great-grandfather [Ellis Ruley] was actually a folk artist. I never knew him because he died back in 1959. I would say that growing up, I always considered myself a little like him. He did things of people in everyday situations you know, and with my trees, I do treat my trees as if they were people, with different personalities and everything. So, I think the gene just carried over between the time he passed away and the time I was born [because] there were no other artists.

T recalls her room as being "pink, really pink." She stated it was a visually stimulating room. She said she decorated her room with:

Posters...of [Michael] Jackson. I had Prince. I had one of Julian Lennon. I had Care Bears—[in fact], I still have Care Bears. I had stuffed animals galore. Doll, Barbie dolls. I had a dollhouse that my mother built for me. Actually, one of the things about me, even when I was young, was that I knew how to keep my room tidy. I was never a messy kid, you know. If I was playing with my toys, I always knew how to put them back where they belonged.

She added that she could not recall the exact age [she developed them], but her organizational skills had a bearing on her personal space:

I knew exactly in the room I wanted my bed to be. Because, I mean, when you first move into a place, you put things here and there. I was not satisfied with how my room was set up, so I actually moved my bed to the other side of the room, moved the

dressers and everything. I actually color coordinated my closet I do the same thing with my T-shirts and tank tops.

When questioned about her early remembrance of visual art, T reported that she was in the fourth grade. She had attended Catholic school in Hartford when she was young, later moving to Torrington, where she had been able to create at the elementary level in a school setting. She said: “Even though I didn’t have it in school, I always loved to draw and paint.” She added, ‘I always knew how to sit and do my work. I was very studious.’ When she was asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, T always told her family members that she would either be an artist or a pilot. She said, “I always loved to fly, but I love my colors. I love my paint. I love my paper. I love my canvas. Art was the only class that I really looked forward to.”

T stated that she was not recognized for her artwork until after elementary school. She said:

I do not really think that happened until college. And I think my mother had a lot to do with it because my mother works where I went to school [for my undergraduate studies]. The lady that runs the library had me do a painting of the bridge that connects this academic side of campus [to the residential side].

T referred to a number of famous artists that influenced her formative years. She said: “I have so many. Charles Burchfield. A lot of the Abstract Expressionists: Pollock, DeKooning, Mitchell. I like Edward Bannister. He was an African American artist with a lot of spirituality in his landscapes”. While engaged in viewing this informant’s work, this researcher noted that a spiritual aspect became evident in the artwork she had created. Within



the work, passages of Scripture had been subtly brushed into areas of paint. The researcher questioned about her work and how it evolved. The informant replied:

I love the woods. People ask me why I paint the woods because it's dark it is scary, you don't know what's out there. But, I see the woods as a metaphor for (what comes) later because you don't know what lies ahead ... you cannot be scared; you must move forward.

She pointed out one of the pieces that were in her studio:

If you take this piece for example—and it's like that in a lot of my pieces—I will put in three trees that represent the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It's the same here [in another painting] if these [trees] weren't here. A lot of folks cannot spot that in the painting.

Though the researcher did not ask about negative experiences that had led to positive discoveries, indications of events acting as agents of change became evident during the interview. When asked if she kept a journal, T replied:

No I did not. I was still in the academic stage and did not quite know where I was going. I knew I wanted to be a landscape painter, but I was nowhere near finding my voice in theater and stuff, so, you know, they pushed me to go outside and from doing that, I would start to write about my experience being out there and relating it to my personal life. I think now is when you start to thrive and get really serious.

After a short conversation about reflection and differences in thought pattern and awareness.

T added:

I have been thinking about this a lot lately. I did not like who I was a year ago. I had a hard year last year. A lot of stuff happened. And, I think my artwork, you know,

obviously had a lot to do with it. I was bouncing from one thing to another and my work from last year was totally different. I was doing stuff that was totally expressive to show my transition. Like, you know, this is supposed to represent having stuff and I thought it was going to stick, but it did not stay with me long. Just working with different materials and everything. Then, I decided that I didn't want to do that.

*Parental support.* T stated that her parents saved a lot of the artwork she had created when she was young. However, she noted that "a lot of stuff got destroyed because they stuck it in the basement and mold got into it." She claimed that support came as feedback and praise. She said: "They never looked at the financial side of it." Instead, she said, they would make comments like, "This is where your heart is and you are taking it seriously," "Look how far you've come," "We are proud of you, and you are going to make it," and "You are going to make it." T added that they always said that she was "born with a gift" she was putting to good use.

T reported that her mother was very proud of her accomplishments in the field of visual art. She would say, T said, "This is my daughter, and you know, I don't like to brag, but she does beautiful artwork and everything." She said that three or four of her mother's coworkers had commissioned work.

*Peer interaction and support.* This informant reflected on her peer interactions at the high school level, recalling how no one really knew each other at first.

I think that one of the greatest things about artists is that you become very close and everything and form this family. In the beginning since we didn't know each other, we were given things to do. We got there totally quiet, and we would do everything. Then, you know, you get more comfortable, you start walking around, seeing what

everybody is doing, and you'd say, "Oh that is really nice." We'd start to play music, and you'd start to open up.

She went on to say that she "was able to socialize with people and get inspiration."

*Instructor support and guidance.* T's response to this code category was short but pertinent to this inquiry. She stated, "I had a very close connection because they were like mothers and fathers; they raised me into what I am today." When making connections to other instructors outside of visual art, she responded, "Maybe writing—you know, English class, literature, classes like that; I definitely had a relationship [with instructors]." She made no comment with regard to specific instructors.

*Instructional environment.* While engaged in time spent with this informant, this researcher noted that T did not contribute data to this code category. The researcher did observe that her studio space was filled with work stacked against the wall, and she was busily preparing for her senior thesis exhibit. The space appeared to be slightly smaller than other spaces the researcher had encountered, but it had a window to let natural light into the space. The studio was near the large group space, and T mentioned outside of the interview that she worked in that space on occasion.

### **MFA Student F**

F worked the whole time that she was interviewed for this study, mixing and brushing paint on a small self-portrait while she looked at herself in a smudged mirror. She described the first piece of artwork that she could recall in childhood as a painting of her mother riding her horse, which artwork was created by a friend while her mother was in college. Sports, particularly swimming, and horses still take up a large portion of her life, and she goes home to live on her family's farm when she leaves school on her break. She was continuing to

build a body of figurative work during her first year in the MFA program. Her motivation and drive had emerged from a competitive, athletic background that paralleled her artistic path. Negative feedback only pressed her to work that much harder. She doesn't know yet where her work in visual art might lead.

*Self-awareness.* F stated during the interview that there was artistic talent within her family. "My father has a lot. He does not draw, but he has the ability to." When asked why, she said, "You have to make a living. You have to work and you have to make a living. When you have five kids, things are more important than [drawing]." She went on, "My sister painted a huge mural of Vikings on my cousin's wall in there living room."

F recalled being "very focused" as a young child. "I did not really talk much at all, ever. [Art] was my favorite class, and I knew what I was supposed to do while I was there, so that is all I wanted to do. I got right to work." She mentioned that she was interested in art "right from the start," adding:

I was doing my own artwork before I was in school. It was something I always did.

Most of our assignment I could do in class and that is what I did in school. That kept me busy. My high school art teacher would tell [us] that when it came time for a show or to bring stuff in or to have a portfolio review, the stuff that class assignments were in took about this much space. The stuff that I brought that I did at home took up this much.

She indicated a sizable amount of difference. F said that looking at other work helped to keep her involved. She said, "Looking at other ideas and finding things that maybe I hadn't thought about before or a technique that I hadn't seen before [was very helpful]. I'm willing to try everything at least once."

This informant listed numerous accomplishments that she was recognized for in her art career. “I won a few contests in elementary school. [I won] an environmental poster contest—a thing about forest fires or endangered animals. I don’t remember.” When F had gotten older, she said, she “won a lot of awards in high school.” She reported:

I used to win the contests that we had to put the cover on the flyer that had all of the annual shows that we did there. It always used to be my artwork. All the art scholarships that were available. Academic ones for art. I won a drawing marathon, and it was a scholarship for the school that I went to. I went to a private school, so I was able to, kind of earn a little bit of money towards it. I won a T-shirt contest, designing T-shirts for our swim team and for neighboring schools.

Despite all the recognition, F made the statement, “I almost didn’t go into art. She said that she had done her undergraduate studies in Michigan, where she was a “full-time Division 1 athlete getting art classes and diving.”

Beside the aforementioned influences within her family, this respondent mentioned some artists whom she found interesting. She said: “I went through different stages of liking people, but I would say that the first artist that I really, really liked was Escher.” F went on to say:

I was drawing a lot. That’s what I have my Bachelor’s in. I like to draw and that stuff was cool to me. That was the first one, but now, it’s completely different. Right now, I love Jenny Saville and Lucian Freud<sup>7</sup>.

When asked to consider negative experiences that she had perceived regarding visual art, F stated:

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<sup>7</sup> Figurative painters.

I deal with negative problems in art the same way I deal with them in athletic and other areas. It was a strong motivation to do better to beat the next guy. People who do not like [my] artwork or say this or that make me work harder to do better because I know already that I am competitive.

She went on to say:

I find that if everything is just negative, negative, there gets to be a point where like, the glass is filled, whether there is positive stuff thrown in there or not. There is like this jar that gets filled, and filled and filled and ultimately, people break down and there is no reason to continue, so they stop.

This researcher was interested in the continual flow of artwork and the many hours of commitment that sports demands. This respondent offered some insights after being asked if she had come back to visual art or had produced artwork while being immersed in athletics. F replied:

I think that there are different periods [during which] it waxes and wanes. I think any artist would say that—that some periods are more dull than others. But, I do keep sketchbooks, working in my sketchbook continuously. And, even when I am not at school, I still have a studio at home and still do commission work here and there. I am always drawing. Always drawing.

*Parental support.* F's parents showed the initial support of saving artwork. When asked what was saved, she said, "Everything." She went on:

My mom saved portraits that I did of the horses we have had. I went through a period where I found construction paper and was cutting out all the different shapes and gluing them together into these big landscape-with-horse type things that were

textured, and they are probably falling apart now, but she still has them. They are up somewhere.

Other than this response, F did not contribute additional data for this code category.

*Peer interaction and support.*

F offered little in response to this code category. She said: “I had more friends who were in athletics than [friends who were in] art’. She did respond to questions concerning the differences between art and non-art peer conversations, adding:

When I talked to people, there was usually a point to talking to them because I was really shy and did not talk a lot. So, if I was talking about art with those people, it was a structured critique sort of thing—talk about what we liked and what we did not like. But mostly the formal elements. Very structured.

*Instructor support and guidance.*

F recalled an art instructor who had apparently left an impression on her in her formative years. She responded:

My art instructor was, you know, real straight forward. If he felt like he had to say something, he said it, and he knew me. We had worked together to where he could say just about anything, and he’d be like, “You really need to prioritize. You need to prioritize. You need to get your head on straight and you have got to prioritize.”

*Instructional environment.*

Fs studio space was in an area away from the large room that was previously described earlier in the study. There were pieces stacked against the walls, abstracted

figurative work. There was an organized feel to her supplies. F did not contribute any data to this code category.

### **MFA Summary**

Generally, MFA informants exhibited a reserve that was unexpected by the researcher. During all interviews at this level, the excitement and animation that was so palpable during the BFA interviews was non-existent. A focus on the work at hand was evident, and informants appeared to be absorbed. There seemed to be a measure of pride in the fact that each informant had a personal studio space in which to conceive and create work, and this became evident when comments were made outside of the interview. Contrary to earlier interviews in the study, the ability of the instructor to guide and support was not as evident in the responses, a potential indicator that artistic emergence had taken place and that instruction and learning had become internalized. Peer support was mentioned regarding descriptions of critiques that took place at regular periods. Peer interaction appeared to be less important for MFA contributors. There appeared to be evidence of more instances of mature introspective reflection, with informants set upon strong personal courses of artistic direction rarely present at earlier stages, also indicating a manifestation of full artistic emergence.

Though some MFA informants had a well-developed personal artistic philosophy, there appeared to be a lack of surety of what was to follow, as if a visual art future might be supplemental to a broader future involving something more.

At the time of the interviews, the immediate task for second-year students was the development of a cohesive body of work for the senior thesis show. Post-interview engagement included the thesis show opening, where the researcher was able to see the work



displayed and follow up on supplemental questions and record affect. Work that was not available for observation at the time of the interviews, allowing the researcher to see the depth of commitment of the informants.

First year students, as one informant stated, were in the process of “finding their voice[s],” to borrow the words of their instructor. They were in the process of completing work for their final critique of the semester.

The contributors to this inquiry, though unique as individuals, presented some shared perceptions recalled from their childhood. These included experiential and environmental situations of interest to the study because of the early occurrence in the lives of each of the informants. All described their early affect in the elementary art class as quiet and well-behaved. Most were quick to describe in detail art projects in class from an early age. In most cases, informants recalled projects as early as kindergarten through age eight.

Most were hard-pressed to name a famous artist who came to mind when they were children, but names that emerged from the questioning—Van Gogh, Picasso, DaVinci—were those typically receiving focus in the elementary curriculum. Influential artists whom informants had recalled at later points in their artistic formation had appeared to be discovered through a result of a personal interest. The degree of descriptive conversation and the ability to describe aspects of color and composition in their recall can possibly be attributed to the interest in art that was promoted within their home and educational lives when they were children.

Recognition for artistic achievement was implied by most of the contributors and provided a form of positive feedback, allowing the informants to seek new goals that perpetuated artistic creation. Contributors in the upper levels of this inquiry seemed to use

self-evaluative assessment to grow as artists. Negative experiences were met by a balancing action.

## **Findings Related to the Research Questions**

### **What Triggers Artistic Emergence?**

Along with descriptors of growing self-awareness, each informant in the study detailed the influence of parents, peers, and instructors as supportive factors in pursuing visual arts as a passion through the questions and related code categories. There was also a high degree of shared perceptions about environmental factors within the art room and studio that also appeared to influence the group as a whole. Coding categories were consistently relevant to this research question.

#### **Self-Awareness Code**

Self-awareness appeared to be accumulated through triggering experiences that began at an early age. Informants said that doing basic creative projects involving cutting paper, gluing, and making things with caregivers or parents were both memorable and pleasurable. These activities provided a means for further success in elementary school.

Informant artwork that had been recognized in the school setting, especially at the elementary and high school levels, appeared to act as a motivational prompt to become more deeply interested in visual art. This is in line with Csikszentmihalyi's (1995) concept that pleasurable feedback leaves the recipient looking for further experiences that are similar. The same could be said for the pleasure felt in earlier creative experiences in elementary school, where the new challenges of each skill appeared to perpetuate a desire to explore even more creative experiences.

## **Parental Support Code**

A common trigger that emerged in interviews with informants in the study occurred at early points in life and focused on the degree of parental indulgence when allowed to pick and choose their own clothing and decorate their rooms. Contributors at all levels of the inquiry identified instances of picking clothing out for themselves with little or no help from parents. The choices would deal with the development of a self-identity promoted by parents. Informants describe guidelines for dress that had been put in place by parents when more formal occasions were attended, however.

One informant had expressed that parental support was not a day-to-day event but would manifest itself in the form of positive feedback on occasion and in the form of frequent gifts of art supplies needed for continued creative endeavors. When queried regarding room colors, most, with few exceptions, described a give-and-take dialogue with parents until both came to some agreement at a midpoint; the beginning of rational discussion and reflection.

Also common across all levels in this study was the informants' ability to ask questions and receive feedback from parents regarding artwork and projects that they were involved with at earlier ages. Parents of most contributors took extra time to bring out artistic qualities in the contributors to the inquiry. One BFA informant stated, "My mother, my teacher. She was good because if I couldn't sleep at night I would come down and we both would draw or something like that." Most of the informants also mentioned occasions on which the family went on art-related trips to museums or libraries to observe artwork. This early trust in the choices made by informants by parents and opportunities to voice opinions at home and during events occurred at a point children would benefit the most from this type

of parental indulgence in developing the ability to observe and act upon things within their environment (Lowenfeld, 1987). Though some informants recollect that their choices were met with parents' skepticism, the act of empowerment no doubt set the stage for early emergence in visual art.

Another common trigger contributing to the development in an appreciation of visual art was made by parents who themselves had actively created artwork and those who retained and displayed work created by deceased family members or those living apart from the immediate family. Only two informants from the three levels of the group had no visual artist they could recall in their families. While parents played an important role in creating art, grandparents or great-grandparents were also recognized as artistic family members.

Some informants recalled work that was created at an earlier point in their fathers' lives, a time before families became a priority. Most fathers with visually artistic skills had apparently viewed the creation of artwork as secondary to supporting their families. BFA informants added that mothers and grandmothers also contributed to the visually enriched environment containing art produced by family members. "My [maternal] grandmother had tons of photographs all over the house," stated one BFA informant. This apparently had enough of an impact on her, regardless of the subject matter inherent in the pieces, to instill within her a passion for photography.

At the MFA level, one contributor did not know if any biological family members were artistically talented because she was raised by adoptive parents. Though this informant acknowledged her adoptive father's reluctance to support her interest in a visual art career, she went on to say that he ultimately supported her. He was also an inspiration because "he was always building things, thinking outside the box," she said. Another explained that her

[maternal] grandfather was a sign painter by trade but painted “wonderful portraits of [her] father, his sister and brother, and [her] grandmother’s house.” Although he died before she was born, the artwork on display in family homes inspired her to become an artist.

Alongside the artistic activity of family members in the lives of the informants was the high value which parents and family members placed on the early work produced by the majority of the respondents in the inquiry. Throughout a child’s educational career, he or she will amass a number of art projects that are produced at each grade level. The kindergarten-through-Grade 8 visual arts curriculum from which most early artwork is produced is designed to introduce new media to the child and to develop progressively finer hand-eye-mind coordination. In the upper elementary levels, cultural and historical aspects of curricular planning leads to meaningful artwork that is prized by parents. Each informant was able to recall her first art teacher, and, in some cases, the first pieces of artwork she created. More importantly, the role of the parent to save artwork brought home by the informant is another key trigger recounted by all in the study. AP and BFA contributors all had stories of artwork that they had created that was kept by parents

An interest in visual art begins at home even before a child enters into a formal educational setting. Naturally, family members who nurtured the informants as children played an instrumental role in guiding this interest. Artwork created by family members and the informants themselves have become artifacts of earlier experiences, a foundation for each informant, helping to support artistic emergence. As children, informants were able to develop a sense that artwork was an important part in life; they were empowered by the fact that it was through an act of creation on their own part. Parental attitude in prizing childhood creation acted as a perpetuating influence in the each informant.

Perceptual differentiation—the ability to perceive and to compare and contrast qualities, even at an early age—sets a solid foundation for what comes next. Through the experiences of observing artwork that parents and family members held in high regard, the informants apparently were able to develop a set of expectations for visual form as part of their growth. The experiences offered a concept of what art is, and informants had a start to developing frames of reference that might not have been present in those without such an opportunity.

### **Peer Interactions and Support Code**

Being involved in the visual arts was held in high regard by many of the students interviewed during this inquiry, and their inclusion into the visual art environment allowed them to positively interact with peers, leading to a fortified continuance of artistic emergence and a perpetuation of interest. In many instances, the positive experiences which had taken place in the art room helped to bring informants to greater proficiency in visual art.

Questions directed at early interactions with peers involved in art at the elementary level were not recalled at any depth by any informant at each of the three levels. Statements concerning how good it felt to be the artist in the class and to be included in enrichment programs “because friends were in it, too” were mentioned by a few respondents. “When I was younger, it was just like any other class until freshman year, when I started being really interested in it”, commented on AP contributor. It was evident that substantial peer support occurred at the high school level because of developmental issues at earlier stages.

Within the visual arts classroom, discussions frequently focus on the expression of ideas, providing openings for conversations about issues and situations within the lives of the students in class. As students gain experience in communicating ideas and personally

reflecting on discussions in class, they become bound in many instances to other students in the class through the shared concepts in which they hold an interest.

An informant at the BFA level made the statement that was echoed by many others across the levels presented in the inquiry: “I would say it’s like a family. Yeah.” Peers within the environment assist in compositional and art-related problems that present themselves. Evidence within the data points to the fact that there is an openness that is present among peers that allows the transmission of ideas that enabled most informants to process and formulate different approaches to problems they encountered while working. An AP informant stated that artistic peers “connect better” in discussions because of a greater awareness of the field of visual art. Peer cooperation led one BFA respondent to develop a successful AP portfolio during her junior and senior years at the high school level. While working on her theme, traditional versus experimental styles in portraiture, the informant stated: “I did a lot of big faces of my friends—you know, stencils, took like thread and just like...” indicating peer support in the production of her artwork.

Informants recounted during the interviews how there is a remarkable difference in the quality of conversations with peers sharing an interest in visual art and those who were not. AP and BFA informants in particular mentioned the fact that conversations with non-artistic peers were particularly frustrating when the visual art students were trying to discuss day-to-day events or observations.

“It’s kind of like two different worlds,” said an AP informant. A BFA respondent offered a similar statement: “You just see things completely different when you are more visual. Everything. Everything is different.” Informants who responded to the question at all levels recalled that being involved in visual art gave them a perspective on the things they

encountered in daily life that was different from those who were not a part of a visual art program. As one MFA informant stated: “Artists speak a language all their own. We see things that not everybody else sees; they do not see it from an artist’s point of view.”

### **Instructor Support and Guidance Code**

More and more, instructors have become increasingly involved at different levels in the lives of their students. As the degree of interpersonal comfort increased during the time spent with instructors, informants described the special attributes that set the visual arts instructors apart from other teachers in their environments. In this researcher’s opinion, visual art instructors are continually involved in artistic life, setting them apart from those in other disciplines. No equipment is necessarily needed when one observes and artistically assesses the light and shadow of daily existence. Artistic thought is woven into the soul. When linked to the skill to teach, it becomes a special gift. The influence these instructors have had on the informants in this study has acted to effectively trigger successful artistic emergence.

At the AP level, the closeness and personal attention displayed by art instructors seemed to be new in the lives of the informants. One contributor stated: “Sometimes [the instructor] just comes over and stares at [me], and I get freaked out.” Another informant mentioned the fact that she’s “not as comfortable with this art teacher as [she] was with Mrs. H,” who would often call attention to her own mistakes, making jokes at her own expense, bringing herself down to a more approachable level. Her current teacher, in the profession for decades, was more formal and reserved. More than one informant mentioned other instructors outside of visual art who were supportive and responsive listeners and acted as guides regarding general problems and issues that occurred in the educational setting.



BFA informants were more practiced with reflective thinking as a whole and viewed past instructors through a different lens. One BFA contributor commented:

I really liked my teacher. He was my advisor for four years. My teacher knew a lot especially about like measuring and traditional skills because he was a really good artist himself and it was good to learn from someone who was really good.

The comfort level described by this informant defined an important level of interaction that furthered learning and skills acquisition.

Support and understanding were also key factors in the success of both AP and BFA respondents. AP informants described the portfolio development process as difficult because of the generation of themes and ideas and stressful because of the looming deadline with its many facets. Generally, instructors offered support through constructive feedback and suggested alternatives to work in progress. One AP informant had a problem with a portfolio submitted for consideration at the college of her choice, only to find that there was an issue concerning a missing piece. The instructor phoned the school to determine what they both could do to rectify the problem. Though the school was reluctant to accommodate the request, the instructor persuaded the admissions office and was able to get the student the time needed to accomplish the requirement.

All BFA informants described instructors who trusted them to complete course requirements, extending deadlines in instances of stress or problematic situations. As one informant stated: “They know what it’s like when your lens breaks or you run out of paper. They will sit with you and say ‘This isn’t bad,’ ‘You’ll be OK,’ ‘Get it together.’” Another added, “They’ve all been there before. They’ll say, ‘Just get it to me next week. Put it in my mailbox—whatever.’”

For the most part, MFA respondents described the instructor as a guide; the majority of feedback apparently came from peers during critiques of work held at regular intervals throughout the semester. The instructor acted as moderator, allowing growth to come from within each student through reflective processing as opposed to direct training and instruction. This appeared to be highly appropriate at this high level of expertise in the visual art field.

All contributors involved in this study describe instructors who had similar attributes; their openness and flexibility allowed for creative empowerment, leading to a closeness that was not present in many instructors in general classes. Visual art instructors were described as being more accepting and having an ability to guide the informants rather than dictate a prescribed way to complete projects. In many cases, informants described how instructors went beyond a daily teaching routine, being available to students beyond what was to be expected of them.

### **When Does Artistic Emergence Generally Occur?**

#### **Self-Awareness Code**

In essence, young children are rarely equipped to successfully emerge artistically because of a lack of experiential background. One possibility can be attributed to the underdeveloped triad of intelligences that would lead to success. The three realms of neural, experiential, and reflective intelligence (Perkins, 1994) make up a formative whole that younger children are only in the process of developing.

Neural intelligence encompasses the contribution of the central nervous system responsible for motor skills and learning styles. Younger children are still in the process, only beginning to acquire these attributes, thus limiting emergence to any extent to those of a

formative nature. Experiential intelligence is related to recall and action derived from past experiences. Because of the limited number of quality experiences related to art production, children can only emerge to certain stages as mentioned earlier in this inquiry. Reflective intelligence is the ability of individuals to assess and act on previous experiences, a factor that would also have a limiting effect on most children. All three work to build off each other in order to reach a critical mass enabling mature artistic emergence.

The pivotal point at which children are most able to grasp more complex skills begins in middle school. The researcher originally believed the period of transition between the middle school and high school levels was a point at which artistic emergence had the greatest potential to occur. As his personal point of emergence and growing self-awareness as an artist, the researcher felt that this was perhaps a typical point for most individuals who found artistically creative experiences exciting. However, when considering Lowenfeld's (1987) stages of artistic growth, he found that this did not ring true for the majority of the students in this study. Another point to consider with regard to artistic emergence is the stress and change presented at this stage of growth- the transition between childhood and adolescence.

Informants at all the levels of the study implied that personal artistic emergence became apparent to them at points that varied widely across the sample. If emergence, in fact, is occurring at incremental points developmentally as contributors made gains from early experiences, those who reported artistically enhanced environments became aware earlier than those who had limited support or resources.

### **Parental Support Code**

An enriched experiential environment leading up to mature emergence made the informants' choice to select visual art an easy one. Important commentary on this point came

from the MFA respondents. One had said, “My mother and I would take trips down to the Wadsworth [Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut].” Another said, “My mother had artistic tendencies. She had a ton of art books lying around.” This information is important in the fact that each informant making these statements had an opportunity to observe and build meaning through examples of what art was comprised a construct of art. These two informants both emerged earlier than the rest of the sample. On the other hand, the AP informant without any artistic input from family members, all of whom were not involved in visual art, emerged in her junior year in high school at the urging of peers.

### **What are the Relationships between School Experience and Artistic Emergence?**

A significant finding of this study is the impact that the instructional environment contributes to artistic emergence. Csikszentmihalyi (1995) stated that an adolescent spends the majority of his or her time being alone (26%), with friends (34%), and with classmates (19%), indicating that most waking hours are spent at school. The coding categories related to this research question will be Peer Interaction and Support, Instructor Support and Guidance, and Instructional Environment.

### **Peer Interactions and Support Code**

Despite Csikszentmihalyi’s (1995) statistics, informants in this study had limited comments concerning peer influence and artistic emergence. Perhaps this is because Csikszentmihalyi’s research was directed at a total population rather than one that is specifically centered. In the experience of this researcher, visual artists develop a strong sense of ego, seeing the work they produce as they move through their educational experience as an extension of the self. A visual artist tends to become proud and possessive, which may account for their relationships within peer groups.

Important support come from the feedback and unity they feel as artist with a similar way of perceiving the world they inhabit. As one informant stated, “I think in an artistic way, you connect with artistic friends more”. One AP informant stated that she and the peers in her circle “kind of see the same thing” perhaps because they know they have something in common and open up to each other. The interaction at the high school level acted to help informants realize that visual art peers form a type of family that can support them after they move to higher educational levels.

Peer support was not mentioned at any depth by MFA students within this study. This is perhaps because artistic emergence had placed a diminished importance on peer relationships outside of critique. Critique is important on all levels of artistic experience and can take place in a group setting or as a one-to-one discussion. Though not mentioned in detail, critique provides a valuable source of feedback that motivates a visual artist to continue to create.

### **Instructor Support and Guidance Code**

Because of the nature of visual art, informants reported instructor support and guidance as being very different from that found in the educational setting. Informants reported that their visual art instructors were more likely to be more open to a wide range of responses. One AP level informant stated, “I think with art they talk to you like you know more because it is just little things that you can correct to do a lot better. But in other classes, if you are wrong, you are wrong.” Another AP informant provided a response that showed that art instructors were more accessible than general instructors were in her experience. She reported:

I think that art teachers go beyond the class while my other teachers pretty much are strictly in class. When my schedule did not fit a single art class into it we fixed it. We changed all my classes, and she told me that if I ever needed anything “to call or e-mail me, blah, blah, blah keep in touch” which I have never done

with any of my other teachers. I have never really kept in touch with any teachers other than art.

A self-empowering learning aspect was reported by informants at the AP level. One informant stated:

You pretty much learn from your own mistakes in art class. If you mix the wrong color and stuff like that, you have to redo it yourself. It’s not someone sitting up there teaching you what to do; it is a learning experience through yourself.

This was apparent—and expected—to an even greater extent at the BFA and MFA levels.

The perception that visual art instructors provided support which affected informants in a positive way was also evident at the BFA and MFA levels. A notable example of instructor interaction from higher level informants was that support was approached from a different perspective. What is surprising is that teachers will recommend doing projects not necessarily related to your main project just to keep yourself loose, so you don’t get too mired in what you are doing at the moment.

These characteristics related to student centered empowerment and involvement seemed to be perceived by the informants as an enjoyable. The fact that instructors were perceived as friends and working artists enhanced artistic emergence at a crucial point in their lives.

Without this type of support, informants may have had a more difficult time at a more mature and complete emergence.

## **Instructional Environment Code**

Visual art is a required subject for students through the eighth grade within the demographic area of the study. Students may begin to pick and choose from electives that include visual art, music, or sports upon entering their freshman year in high school. Scheduling constraints and suggestions on the part of guidance counselors often direct or limit choices. Despite this potential interference with personal choices, this period in a student's educational career remains an optimal point to choose the direction to proceed depending on individual preferences.

Experiencing an art room environment has had a lasting effect on possibly every informant in the study and was recalled as being significantly different from the environment found in general classes. The less structured atmosphere, when coupled with an instructor who was sensitive to the needs of the individual, promoted an efficacy that propelled each informant to higher levels of performance. This revelation was most evident in the accounts offered by AP students who were becoming cognizant of these differences and BFA students who recalled the differences and related them to their current situations at the college level. In fact, the high school art room environment was similar in many respects to studios at a college level, with a high degree of trust placed in individuals who showed a commitment to instructors regarding their drive toward the completion of projects and course requirements. The only difference between the two was that goals and direction were imposed by the high school instructors to a more involved degree.

With regard to the art room environment, AP informants consistently responded that art classes were preferable over any classes in the regular school environment. All informants had a deep desire to spend as much time in the art room as they possibly could. One stated:

“Art classes are more focused. People actually want to be there, and I think that everyone gets along a lot better in an art class. Everyone seems to help each other out. In regular classes it’s not really like that at all.” When observing classrooms, this researcher has noted that most students tend to form working groups because of seating constraints, yet they come together during critiques to discuss problems and to praise well-done projects. There appears to be little friction in most art classes with which the researcher has had association.

The openness of a visual arts room includes sensory stimuli that are sometimes absent from general class environments. An important point mentioned earlier in the study shows that these types of rooms would have a positive impact on the informants and other emerging artists. AP informant said: “I like it because like most art classes they allow you to listen to music, which can help you with your artwork a lot of the times.” When considering displays of work in other rooms, an informant who was developing an eye for aesthetic treatments added, “Walls are obviously covered with artwork, and in my other classes are covered with kids’ math papers and stuff. It’s kind of like nobody really cares about it but the kid whose paper it is.” The instructional aspect of the visual art classroom appeared to be more conducive to a more natural way to observe and learn than in an academic classroom. Art instructors offered a broader pace toward their assignments. Unlike most core courses in which students need to keep up a sometimes difficult pace, art classes tend to allow students to set their own pace, according to informants. An AP contributor stated, “Well, you get an assignment for a few weeks and every day you go straight to work.” From the BFA level, a respondent reflected: “I think you are given more responsibility because they trust you to get it in on time. You are given big pieces, and the curriculum is different every year.” There



appears to be a routine established in which a degree of comfort is created, yet the spontaneity of personal choice is an attribute that the environment offers.

Informants at the BFA level made the same observations when recalling the art rooms they were associated with during their high school years. The input of the BFA respondent schooled privately was important because the environment in the art room at her school was remarkably like that found at the college level. She said: “The art room had a lot of easels, open space, light. You had to be there for class periods. The studios were generally open; you could go there in the middle of the night if you wanted.”

At the college level, each class retained the open quality cited by both AP and BFA contributors, but are different because of media or instructor preferences. One BFA informant describes her photograph lab class:

We would go in and she would lecture; it would be like lens, flashes or different styles of photography, like documentary or commercial. We’d have a break. Then we would have lab time where we would just go and print or develop film or shoot for a while.

Another BFA informant added:

Each of my classes is very different depending on the media. A typical art class ... like drawing ... what we do in college is like an 8-hour day. You are on your feet the whole time. It is a lot of figure drawing with just charcoal and big pieces of newsprint. Basically, you work for 8 hours.

The extended working period at this level effectively builds experiential skills needed for continued emergence. Similarities present in art rooms at all of these levels offer continuity of a special working environment that respondents found to be preferable.

More negative dialog and harsher criticism have been informally observed in the general classes.

In other classes you have a short leash. They make sure that you are doing this or that. You can't talk... you can't even whisper. (At this point, the informant gets louder and more animated.)...or like ask someone for help because the teacher won't explain as well as if you ask your friend. But they don't allow you to ask your friend. I don't see the point in that.

Another AP contributor made this observation: "Everyone has to take math, and everyone has to take English, but only the people who want to take [art]."

Contrary to this AP informants statement, not all students in lower levels of visual art instruction have a desire to take the subject. Of interest to this study is the issue of students placed in art class by guidance counselors so those students can fulfill credit requirements; these students can be the root of tension. Students who choose to concentrate on their art work are frequently distracted by students in the class who lack an interest in the subject.

All respondents offered descriptions that pointed out critical differences present in general education classes outside of visual art. For the most part, the differences were negative, with classrooms in the public school setting being less focused and noisy. The student body in these environments appeared, through commentary offered by contributors, to be somewhat disinterested and more likely to be disruptive. Most informants spoke of being distracted in outside class room environments, stating that the art room was like a sanctuary, despite its being less structured.

### **What Considerations Must be Present for the Perpetuation of Artistic Interest?**

An interest in continuing along the path to artistic emergence is rooted in the positive experiences and feedback that individuals receive both at home and in the educational setting. The acts of retention and recognition for artwork that has been created by the informants in this study has been a factor in perpetuating an interest. For the purpose of this study, the code categories concerned with self-awareness, instructor guidance and support, and instructional environment will be discussed.

#### **Self-Awareness Code**

Self-awareness as an artist is developed through experiential accumulation throughout an informant's past. The construct of the self as a visual artist has been acted upon by parents, peers, and entire instructional environments in reciprocity for all each informant has gained through selective experiences related to visual art. The results of a determined personal effort on the part of contributors to persevere on the path of visual art is only the broadest example of a desire to perpetuate a continued interest. The positive, concentrated involvement of people and schools has acted to shape and motivate each informant. Contributors grow as visual artists while responding to both negative and positive feedback from parents and instructors while learning a new way of thinking. Experimental work in a new media along with a flood of new ideas opens up new pathways for creative growth.

One of the first motivational inspirations in the early years of the contributors was the recognition of early work. Informants at each level of the inquiry recalled mostly positive feedback about early recognition from parents, peers and instructors. This provided a comfortable entry into showing work to an audience. Most informants began creating first-

memorable artwork between the ages of five and eight. Artwork hung in teachers' rooms, for example. One AP student reflected to being recognized by an instructor who selected her work and took the time to get involved beyond regular classroom interactions. "The Long Island Sound Project... that was it ...my family was proud."

As high school students, all AP students in the district observed in this inquiry contribute to a show that coincides with a musical event at the end of the school year. The pairing of the two events at one time allows quite a large number of people to look at student art work. One informant remarked that she got her O'Keeffe-inspired flower into the show and then stood off to the side and listened to comments as the viewers reacted to her work. She said people "mentioned scale and color. It felt pretty good." Another informant at the AP level mentioned her recollection of the event. She had contributed a self-portrait. "My friend saw it, and she asked me to draw a picture of her."

At the next level in the inquiry, BFA informants recalled previously favorable showings. Interesting data came from the contributor from the private school sector. The variety of outlets to provide art to an audience appeared to create rich experiences for the students to receive feedback that reinforced their self-awareness as artists.

We had this thing called the Orchard Award. The school will keep pieces of your artwork until your 5<sup>th</sup> year reunion so they could frame it and hang them around the building. I had two pieces that got cups, Orchard Awards, that year. We also have Lantern (the school's literary booklet). I was the editor for that but like I did not necessarily choose all the artwork, but I always had a lot of pieces in that.

## **Parental Support Code**

Much has been said concerning the impact of the family of the informants in this study and their ability to enable and promote an interest in visual art. This parental support also impacted a perpetuation in this interest. Informants reported triggering experiences related to this perpetuation. One informant's statement that her family decorated its new home around her artwork is an example demonstrating that parental support can promote a prolonged application of skills to fulfill a parental request.

Another instance of parental efforts regarding the perpetuation of interest is evident in this report by a BFA informant:

I showed him (father) the plan because he helped me get all the lumber when I came home for Thanksgiving and he was like "O.K., these are the faults with your design", and how to make it better. So, there was a lot that I had to figure out on my own once I got back to school, but a lot of it was him ... he brought me to the lumber yard to talk to that guy about ways to make it structurally sound, even though it was pretty simple.

In another instance, an informant's father had taken the time to show her the proper steps to work out problems, possibly building up a degree of self-confidence that the informant could benefit from in the future.

## **Peer Interaction and Support**

Efforts from peers close to the informants have helped lead to perpetuation of artistic interests in the informants. For example, the statement, "People always regarded me as the artist in a group of friends and stuff," is a lower level prompt that might have had an impact on this informant's pursuit of visual art, the identification as an artist having left a

pleasurable feeling. The closeness of peers that begins to develop at the high school level by being involved in visual art classes provides a consistent environment for perpetuation to occur. At the BFA level, informants indicated that they started to

experience long periods of time away from a family structure at home, new relationships can be established because of a common interest

Everyone in my classes was really close and we talked to each other all the time. It was really nice because if you freak out, you could be like, “Let’s go somewhere.” We live in Boston, so we would just walk around real quick and then come back.

### **Instructor Support and Guidance Code**

Informants said little with regard to instructor guidance and support; what has been revealed has provided important aspects on instructors’ roles in perpetuating an artistic interest. In informant reports, instructors have appeared to be subliminal with regard to perpetuation, but have stepped in to provide vital triggers that have led to the promotion of continued interest in visual art. Evidence in the study indicates that instructors can further a perpetuation of interest by allowing informants to explore and experiment with concepts and media. Instructors can offer feedback and challenges that sequentially build each informant up and help them continue their interest in visual art.

At the high school level, AP informants indicated that instructors had helped with problematic occurrences while, for the most part, preferring to let them learn from their mistakes as creative artists

You pretty much learn from your own mistakes in art class. If you mix the wrong color and stuff like that, you have to redo it yourself. It's not someone sitting up there teaching you what to do; it is a learning experience through yourself.

Learning experiences of this type seem to find resonance in Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) referrals to the small challenges that need to be overcome in order to find fulfillment at tasks of choice. Each successful result keeps the individual interested and willing to attempt another, more complex assignment.

Another way that instructors have promoted a continued interest in visual art is through recognition for work that they saw as exemplary. The account of one AP informant's early acceptance for her calendar artwork no doubt afforded a measure of self-confidence that allowed her to create more artwork. Acceptance into the National Art Honor Society is another example of recognition.

One aspect of instructor effort that helped to guide informants along the path were the accounts of the help that teachers provided when difficulties arose during attempts to gain entrance to classes and schools. Among the negative experiences reported by informants were accounts of instructors who followed up on portfolio reviews in which students had been upset by negative feedback. The interceding instructors helped to smooth out the rough experience. *Instructional Environment Code*

*Negative experience as a motivator for perpetuation.*

Informants identified the challenge of being new to an art classroom and finding a way to fit in among visual art peers. Being new to the environment tended to isolate these contributors, allowing them to deal with the situation by focusing their energy on creative

efforts. Successful projects done at this point had the potential to enable positive feedback that might help to perpetuate interest in visual art.

Portfolio reviews to get into colleges of choice are a formidable challenge to students. Instructors offer catalogs and guide students to suitable schools depending on stylistic indicators. A review adds up to the first real critique an art student gets; a rite of passage to a higher level delivered by an uninsulated, unattached individual or small group capable of delivering devastatingly sharp commentary. The ability to attain admittance is a motivational goal. It was an unanticipated detail that the researcher did not consider before undertaking this inquiry. A transition of this degree, seen on a less developed scale at the middle to high school levels, can appear to be a demoralizing issue that would act as a gate across the path, keeping some who are talented from stepping outside a personal comfort zone to accept the challenge to master skills. An AP student recalled a particularly harsh review:

They basically told me I was flat and boring and that everything was the same, and that it was intriguing. And that was the Art Institute of Boston. It was kind of crushing because you know it's something that I like to do, and that everyone has their different styles and taste and everything. But it was just like so blatant. I waited almost two hours and spent ten minutes with her ... I spent five minutes waiting for the University of Hartford and they liked my stuff, so ...

Another recalled a negative experience; during a portfolio review, many individuals with a wide range of talent present their portfolios in hopes of gaining admittance. A reviewer must take a well informed snapshot of features in the work, and pass judgment often at an expense for more detailed explanations. Interestingly, AP portfolio reviewers are trained to observe and record the four levels of proficiency and still make judgments for Level 4 portfolios,



normally the highest level, within a few minutes. This effectively tests the patience and civility of some portfolio reviewers dealing with face-to-face critique. Nonetheless, students who face the criticism and use the feedback to shape their style and hone their skill benefit from the experience even when they disagree with the reviewer or find the criticism unduly harsh. A BFA respondent stated:

It wasn't my first portfolio review, but it was one of the first ones ... And the guy made me cry. I have a real weird style when I draw. I'm into making different kinds of lines. No shading ... squiggles and stuff. He was a design teacher He was like 'this is messy'.

She mentions that when her art instructor heard of the treatment, she contacted the university about the encounter. The student was accepted into the Arts Institute of Boston for Photography, but continues to draw and explore experimentation media.

*Stress as a motivator for perpetuation.*

Stating stress as a motivator might be construed as a negative initiator to perpetuate a passion but must be considered within the scope of this study. More than two informants stated that fathers did not want them to pursue visual art goals only to succumb to the wishes of their children. Another commonly shared perception is the stress level associated in the development of an exemplary portfolio. The portfolio represents deeply personal work. It is the accumulated expression that is reflected upon, acting as a self-competitive collection an artist tries to make progressively better.

For the scholastic (award) I had to put in a lot of older stuff and not all the stuff I was working on for my AP. I did not have as much done as I should have. (The informant smiles and looks down, smile fading) It was like midnight when he came and found

me up there, and he was like ‘I looked at your portfolio. You need to send in different stuff because you are not going to get well with that’.

She continued to reply, telling of how she worked to develop a new body of work in order to not only complete the portfolio, but enter into a school renowned for the difficulty of getting on a first try.

BFA respondents mentioned some anxiety during critiques and peer interaction, but mid-term and final student shows and ongoing reviews were most prevalent contributions.

For my crits (Critique Week), I was freaking out. My roommate ... I felt so bad. I was stressed out ... I would be up until three in the morning figuring out which ones I am going to (include). Then I’d get up at eight o’clock and do it all over again, and she’s like ‘You need to calm down and go to bed ... do anything, just stop freaking out’. Your crit is worth 40% of your grade ... If you screw up your crit, you are done.

The process the informant put herself through resulted in receiving a favorable response from her instructors. The reaction time at higher levels seems to shorten so that informants had to think, assess, and perform, yet the drive to continue remained.

Another motivator for more than one informant that became a strategy for continuing artistic emergence was that of competition on personal and interpersonal levels. As one BFA informant recalled, she became jealous in elementary school when someone else in her art period would receive praise from her teacher. While responding to interview questions about her recollection of a high school instructor, one MFA informant stated:

No matter what your commitment to art in high school, it wasn’t enough for him. And it wasn’t anything I was bitter about or anything, but it was a constant, driving, motivating force. I understood it at the time and I understand it now. It was good.

She finished by saying that positive feedback was essential to creative progress and that negative feedback made her work harder to do better.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY**

This chapter shows the relationships of this study with previous research that links developmental and cognitive growth with visual artistic emergence. First, a brief review of sample and methodological procedure has been provided, followed by highlights of the findings and the relationships to previous research. Three areas are discussed: (a) the impact of self-awareness and its impact on artistic emergence; (b) the role of parents and their contribution; and (c) the importance of instructors and the instructional environment. Limitations regarding the study are revisited, and further questions that imply directions for future research are generated. A concluding summary provides a possible view of how education leaders can benefit art education in the future.

Research was conducted using naturalistic inquiry and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Hypotheses were allowed to emerge while this researcher was embedded within the environments of the informants. Data for this study were compiled from ethnographic, semi-structured interviews that resulted in thick description. It was presented in a case study format. Data were coded to detail triggering experiences and shared perceptions that guided each informant. Each constructed reality was not a linear singularity in scope because of the unique perception of each informant's collective experiences. The resulting multiple perspectives and multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) provided triangulation across the different levels encompassed in the sample.

### **Highlights of the Study**

This study has found that artistic emergence is a series of experiences leading to the choice to pursue visual art as a passion. Emergence leading to perpetuation occurs in stages, each triggered by people and experiences in the lives of individuals who choose to focus on

visual art for pleasure or for creative output. For informants in this study, the first steps toward artistic emergence began in early childhood and were influenced by growing self-awareness and family, peer, and instructor guidance. A deepening personal interest in visual art was driven by positive feedback that affected each individual, establishing artistic self-awareness. Interest becomes self-perpetuating in response to the pleasurable act of creating (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995). Informants continued the pursuit of creative aspects inherent in visual art because of personal challenge and reward.

The sample for this study was comprised of four Advanced Placement (AP) high school students, two Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) students, and four Master of Fine Arts (MFA) students for a total sample of 10. Informants at each level who contributed these data expressed a strong drive and personal need to engage in creative encounters. The concentrated effort to develop AP and college portfolios, to submit to repeated critiques, and to continue a high degree of collective creativity are required by these challenges. All but two informants stated that a realization to pursue visual art occurred during their high school careers; two realized their artistic paths when in middle school.

Each of the informants was observed and interviewed through semi-structured questioning strategies using Spradley's (1979) method of ethnographic interviewing. Questions were grouped into descriptive, structural, and contrast categories. The questions allowed the interviewer to gather data and develop the thick description that was coded to generate hypotheses. The response coding process initially consisted of 65 codes, which were then collapsed to provide five axial codes: Self Awareness; Parental Support; Peer Interactions and Support; Support and Guidance from Instructors; and Instructional

Environment. These data were used to define common triggers and shared experiences that were held by the majority of informants in the study to define emerging hypotheses.

### **Findings Related to the Literature**

#### **Viktor Lowenfeld**

Descriptions of elementary experiences recalled by informants were consistent with Lowenfeld's earlier stages of artistic development (Lowenfeld, 1987), in which each new creative skill is added to a growing body of experiential knowledge. The easy recollection of first attempts at artwork that were expressed by a number of informants described a sense of pleasant memory associated with creation. All informants had recalled that much of their work was saved by parents, attesting to the fact that the works were charming enough to be retained and, in some cases, framed by family members.

Information provided by Lowenfeld (1987) aligned with the findings presented in this inquiry. The seven constructs—emotional, intellectual, physical, perceptual, social, aesthetic and creative—of growth presented by Lowenfeld (1987) coalesced in adolescence, allowing informants to realize the potential they held for further exploration of visual art as an interest. Realization was precipitated through a developing sense of self-awareness. Parental and peer support, instructor guidance, and the impact of the art room were also associated with this growth. These were then used to create the axial code categories used in this study.

Informants found that the ability to grasp more complex skills which offered challenges were motivators for continued interest in adolescence. In high school, peer relationships began to influence artistic direction in the form critiques and more mature discussions about art reported by informants. These interactions appeared to gain significance

in the minds of the informants as they found themselves in a new social context and environment at the college level.

### **Howard Gardner**

The informants' initial realization to become artistically motivated occurred at a point most of the informants were emerging from a dip in self-confidence that Gardner (1982) described at the ninth and tenth grade levels. This dip may precipitate a more advanced state of artistic emergence under the right set of circumstances: the growth of self-awareness; parental and peer support; and the guidance of instructors in a nurturing and exciting environment.

Gardner's (1982) U-shaped curve begins at a high point of unrestrained creativity in the very young and dips during the onset of adolescence (p. 220). Though this was not recognized as a result in direct discussions with informants, there appeared to be a gap or lapse in memory concerning this period among the majority of informants. Only two informants stated that they found visual art to be significant in terms of a future interest. The lack of response revolving around the middle school years and artistic production may be consistent with the low point of Gardner's curve.

Informants' comments point to the importance of parental support of their children's art goals and recognition of children's early artwork. These actions present a series of triggering factors for emergence from the difficult transition period. There is an indication that friends and peer relationships begin to have an effect on artistic emergence, becoming stronger as a result of the transition between middle and high school. At this point, informants mentioned, friends who saw them as artists had a positive effect on their interest in visual art.

A realization similar to Gardner's (1984) "crystallizing experience" (p. 8), the life-changing revelation that visual art was the only path, has no apparent merit in this study. Informants did not mention such an experience affecting their artistic emergence. Rather than an epiphany that changed the direction of the informants, a series of triggering events led them deeper and deeper into the field of visual art and to an eventual emergence as mature, skilled artists.

### **Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi**

The optimal experience presented by Csikszentmihalyi is consistent with this study as an important characteristic for visual artistic emergence to take place. At each stage of artistic development, favorable experiences involving small but important challenges have given the informants a focused sense of purpose. The family was initially responsible for promoting and supporting an interest in visual art. This support continued to some extent in the informants' lives on all levels represented in this study. The impact of these experiences became increasingly evident at the high school level, when more mature levels of artistic emergence began to develop in the art room. During prolonged engagement and interviews, informants recalled characteristics related to flow experience without existing knowledge of Csikszentmihalyi's construct.

Family experiences with a potential to promote flow encounters leading to pleasure and happiness also related to artistic emergence. Csikszentmihalyi (1969) identified the characteristics of these experiences as clarity, choices, centering, commitment, and challenge. Two appear to be most recognizable in informant data. The first was the opportunity to select from available choices related to room accessories and clothing. Options to possibly break parental rules along with associated appropriate consequences



provided learning experiences. The other characteristic was centering. This was evident in recollections of childhood artwork that was saved, creating the perception that parents had an interest in what creative progress had happened in their children's lives. The action centered informants emotionally for optimal experiences to occur in their futures.

Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) facets of flow experience have been described during informant interviews. To review the significance of challengingly pleasurable experience to this study, optimal experience most often take shape when (a) the task is likely to be completed, (b) the task requires concentration, and (c) the task behind the experience has clear goals and offers immediate feedback. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Informants referred instructors and the projects they had presented in the visual art classroom. . The level of skill present for the completion of a successful attempt at AP portfolio conception and preparation would indicate that AP informants possess a high degree of control at task. Their portfolios were developed while concentrating to a point of focus at which distractions in the studio environment were not noticed. This characteristic of flow experience was mentioned by the guiding AP instructor and was evident in the finished portfolios.

In the experience of this researcher as instructor, students become involved to such a point that they lose track of the time while working on visual art projects in the class. This was frequently experienced during the time spent with informants at the high school level. It is another characteristic of optimal experience. Outside of interviews AP informants stated they felt artistically constrained as a result of classes ending too soon while they were working in the art rooms; they had wished to stay and continue on projects they were working on. This often resulted in their returning to the art room to continue their involvement, attesting to the favorable environment presented there.

Informants at the BFA and MFA levels made similar statements regarding their coursework and time spent within the studio environment. Longer, more intensive periods alleviated the constraints found at the AP level. The informant educated in private school recalled a college-like atmosphere at the high school level, in which she described probable indicators for the propagation of flow experiences. These included working late and painting in exciting and challenging environments outside the classroom. Preparing for important critiques and year-end shows involved the same flow characteristics but in a more intense way. Informants who have had an optimal experience seek out more because these experiences provide both a challenge and a potentially successful outcome. Each one builds upon previous episodes, leading individuals towards repeated levels of personal satisfaction.

Csikszentmihalyi's (Hektner & Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) theory describing optimal experiences and happiness as a motivational impetus for perpetuity is also evident in these data from informant reports of the art room environment. The art room and studio environment are constructed by teachers to be conducive to creative experiences. Some of the most striking data related to the perceptions that were recalled pertaining to the art room environment.

The relationship of flow experience and art room environment was revealed when informants compared the art room to their general classrooms in which they had received instruction. This was most pronounced at the high school level, where differences were perceived at a new level of cognizance. Whereas the art room was arranged to facilitate the execution of creative projects, the general class was set up according to traditional pedagogy. Core subjects were taught in ordered rows for ordered thinking. Instructors dictated learning rather than allowed it to happen through natural wonder and student-generated inquiry.

Displays and decorations promoted visual apathy. General classrooms were described as being distracting because students were not linked by a desire to be there. In the opinion of contributing informants, disruptive behavior in core subject classrooms precluded the ability to achieve optimal experience.

The visual art room was recalled as one conducive to flow experience. Students possessed a greater degree in controlling choices while generating projects contributing to their art education within it. There have been very few behavioral issues with students labeled disruptive in other classes within the art room environment of this researcher. These students seem to emulate the affect of interested students, and are responsive to the way the lessons are allowed to evolve.

Within the art room, other informally observed high performing students act as unofficial mentors because they perceive all students in the class as part of a family. This positively affects students who have a potential interest, though not deeply committed to visual art. Informants stated that the trust placed in them by instructors to get the assignments done was predicated on their skill level and their abilities to focus attention on tasks. Student empowerment resulted in the precipitation of flow experiences.

The only exception to classroom environments perceived to have the same qualities as visual art in this study was the subject of English. This was recalled by two informants as having similar qualities related to trust and student control over choice. Students with whom this researcher has had the opportunity to speak outside of this study mentioned a special fondness for their English instructors. Many students' classes were involved in producing illustrated books under the guidance of their English teachers. The issue of creative license

was mentioned as another reason for this fondness, reiterating the point that happiness provided by flow experience is not relegated to the visual art environment.

### **Sir Ken Robinson**

This study is connected to the work of Sir Ken Robinson (2008) concerning the issues of self-awareness, and parental and peer support. Revealed in his research is the construct that intelligence is considered to be individualized and unique. Robinson (1995, 2006) believed that creation and innovation are an off-shoot of intelligence. . Instructors effectively promote both of these attributes within visual art rooms. Informants claimed that the work that they produced was synthesized from personal creative experiences, emerging as an individual style. Innovation to produce new concepts and artwork was derived from the trust and empowerment given by parents and instructors.

Informants stated that the contribution made by parents in promoting visual art at home included not only the retention and display of artwork but also the discussion of grandparents and great-grandparents as a part of an artistic family legacy. The support of the extended family was a critical component that will affect the structure of education Robinson envisions for the future.

Studies provided by Robinson (2008) described the educational characteristics that would align with findings related to peer discussion and group formation. AP students expressed a dawning awareness of how peer support could help them build the confidence needed to begin successful, mature artistic emergence. Peer groups became extrinsically motivating as the informants found unity at the college level where they were considered to be artists. These groups formed an increasingly vital source of feedback needed in order to keep informants moving forward, especially at the critical period in which they emerged as

mature artists. Robinson (2008) has pointed out that “a diversity of intelligent input” (p. 57) makes peer groups excellent vehicles for bringing about change to artwork. This is evident during critiques and portfolio reviews. Artistic creation hanging in shows promotes dialogue among groups of viewers, promoting feedback important for perpetuative motivation.

Robinson’s (2008) issue with customization of educational models affecting student learning has been presented especially pertaining to the art room and student-centered generation of solutions. The characteristics he describes can apply to a smaller scale, community-based educational construct, although his comments refer to a global construct and a technology-based society.

### **Barnaby Nelson and David Rawlings**

Nelson and Rawlings’s (2007) research reaffirmed characteristics found by Csikszentmihalyi (1991) that defined optimal experiences. The characteristics paralleled the constructs of flow experiences and added two key features which enhanced them. Missing from the original set of facets was the issue of becoming settled in preparation for the process of creating, and the feelings that arose after the experience had concluded.

By being settled in preparation for the process of creating artwork, a stronger focus to plan out the process of artistic creation was achieved. AP informants stated that this became most evident when they were able to walk around in the art room to discuss projects with peers. Listening to music while they were working was another activity that focused informants. Taking breaks during long college-level classes let BFA students step away from the work in order to see it differently upon returning.

An “intensely felt emotional reaction to completing the artwork” (Nelson and Rawlings, p. 237) has been indicated by informants while describing portfolio preparation or

critiques. The completion and subsequent rejection or acceptance of work would amount to a culmination of a creative experience which would elicit such an emotional reaction.

### **Limitations**

Qualitative research presents limitations which are specific to the paradigm. Transferability has been achieved in the form of thick description. The focus and direction of thick description generating these data provides a means for the transferability for further study of visual artistic emergence to be pursued by interested researchers seeking to study this topic. Purposive sampling of visual artists at the purported period of artistic emergence to occur has allowed an avenue for further study for others wishing to utilize these findings in other, more empirical studies.

### **Informants**

The sample of ten informants was composed an all-female group, with no responses from males contacted for the study. Data derived solely from a one-gender sample may have offered descriptive data that enhanced or detracted from the findings. Data from a male informant might have offered a more well-rounded perspective with respect to outcomes related to the research questions.

The process of interviewing each informant had assumed flaws in the perception and reconstruction of past experiences. This can elicit an account that had been altered over time, thus corrupting the original experiences behind data that is recalled by the informants. Replies can be enhanced or diminished, depending on the informants' reactions to the original experiences. The questioning strategy (Spradley, 1979) used in this study was designed to offset some of this tendency. Questions directing informants to appropriately

reflect along specific lines of thought in order to offer multiple perspectives and constructed realities focused on artistic emergence (see Appendix F).

### **Researcher Bias**

Though not intentional, researcher bias has been assumed in this research process. Because of personal inabilities in exercising personal freedom at an early age in selecting clothing and room accoutrements, the researcher included questions consistent with this bias. In his defense, the researcher has stated that the questions offer responses that have pointed to the fact that such abilities mark the earliest instances of a form of parental support for creative output and the formation of self-awareness in visual art. The fact that the researcher has been actively involved in a variety of visually artistic activities for more than 40 years may contribute additional bias to the study.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Applying existing research to the construct of artistic emergence calls for assumptions to cover lack of available research to this point. Past research lacked a solid connection to visual artistic emergence, though vital in the intent for which they were published. This has led to a reliance on older studies associated with the topic. The discontinuity between seminal studies from the past and a constantly changing present will need to be revisited. This inquiry has provided some material to fill in the gaps. Future research with larger, mixed gender samples may discover the ways in which artistic emergence can be enhanced at any of its formative stages. In considering the direction of this study, there are some key questions which come to mind. Methodology could be approached either quantitatively or qualitatively.

## **Enhancing the Home Environment to Promote Artistic Emergence**

Exposure to visual art at an early age at home and in school furnished the beginnings of a growing interest in the informants that were interviewed. Supportive parents and family members who placed a value on visual art have contributed to each informant's artistic emergence. Instructors at the elementary level who showed a personal interest and provided artistic guidance must contribute to successful levels of emergence.

This study has provided a wider view into these unnoticed factors that have acted as triggers allowing individuals to consider visual art as an enjoyable experience.

Future inquiry might include the feasibility of parental involvement into the elementary classroom. At the elementary level, art instructors have very little time with students. Kindergarten art instruction is limited to one 20-minute period a week, with other classes scheduled as 30 to 40 minute periods once a week. Many art instructors split between two or more schools. This researcher has received information of the potential reduction of elementary visual art periods to 20 minutes every other week, so that a new program could be instituted by the school principals. Visual art is clearly viewed as a secondary subject at a critical time in a child's life. Efforts to find ways to develop a stronger case for visual art in the general scheme of education should be explored.

Would a school-family collaboration to supply new strategies for creative experiences or enhance existing ones enable a greater artistic presence in both school and home environments? The identification of families having sensitivity to visual art and their potential involvement in creative after-school programs can have an ability to enhance efforts already under way at their children's school. A visual arts program with diminished depth



would benefit from research seeking to forge stronger links between students, families and the school at all levels.

### **Promoting Visual Art in Elementary Classrooms to Influence Artistic Awareness**

This researcher has been involved in instruction of Masters level courses for future elementary teachers for the past six years at a private Connecticut university. The course is offered during Summersession, and is worth two credit hours. The students acquire strategies for facilitating the arts into their unit and lesson planning within general classrooms while teaching core subjects. This is an acknowledgement that the arts are woven into all courses, and that they can be used to promote student achievement. Further inquiry on how effective these efforts have been may someday lead to the structure of professional development planning in which seasoned teachers in core subjects may also be offered these strategies. How beneficial are these courses for student success at the elementary level? Can they be expanded to utilize the arts in learning core subjects at all levels?

### **Identifying the Degree of Opportunity for Offering Positive Experiences**

One of the most pointed facets to emerge from this study is that the concept of emergence occurs as a series of triggering events. These events are based upon an experiential accumulation driven by the pleasure of creation and discovery (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995). Knowledge acquired through living and learning in both home and school, allowing an individual to unfold and grow in stages (Lowenfeld, 1987). This inquiry has provided previous research that has focused on adolescence as a tipping point in life for support and guidance (Gardner, 1982).

Both Csikszentmihalyi (1995) and Robinson (2006) have pointed out that much of a student's life unfolds in an educational setting that often lacks positive experiences, leading

to a disinterest in schooling. Even more disheartening to both teachers and students alike is the shift in teaching and learning towards high-stakes testing. One instructor that this researcher recently spoke with had lamented about how testing had caused her to teach algebra rather than geometry at the sophomore level. This was because she was unable to focus on anything but teaching in preparation for the testing held during that year. The strategies she preferred would have been much more interesting to students in her class than those related to testing readiness.

Further research into how visual art strategies can be undertaken to offset any undesirable experiential events during the critical time span encompassing middle and early high school. Intensive test preparation is perceived to be burdensome by teachers and students alike. Perhaps alternate approaches including visual art components would benefit the educational environment.

### **Incorporating Visual Art as Core Curriculum to Ease the Transition from Middle to High School**

Though this study has determined that interest in visual art began to coalesce at a much earlier age, informants in this inquiry have indicated that the desire to become more involved in visual art occurred at the high school level. A predilection for artistic exploration had begun at home, and continued to be nurtured throughout childhood. Why should this desire to work in an artistic media be suddenly cut off between middle and high school, where it could offer an easier transition? What if visual art was used to bridge the gap, rather than being left behind as a required subject?

Since this age group coincides with the Gang Stage proposed by Lowenfeld (1975), the feasibility of a mentor group composed of high school students skilled in visual art

techniques could be employed to boost interest in the subject. Preadolescent and early adolescent students interested in visual art respect the artistic skill of older students

In this researcher's experience, high school level guidance departments in some school systems tend to move students into academic strategies that favor core subjects instead of art classes at the ninth grade level. As freshmen, the focus on core subjects first leave electives, including visual art, until later in a student's high school career. Some very talented individuals start taking visual art as juniors and seniors, drastically curtailing any future potential as artists. In discussions with talented students who have entered visual art classes later in their educational careers at the high school level, many have stated that they were unable to take classes earlier because of curricular requirements and limited space.

Instead of directing talented individuals into a possible media of choice as Robinson (1995) describes, guidance departments frequently see visual art courses as a last resort for students with academic or behavioral issues to gain graduation credit. As a result, visual art electives can be filled with students who have no particular desire to develop a talent, leaving interested individuals closed out because of space constraints. School districts with strong visual arts backing and strict curricular requirements have minimized this issue to some extent, but the current focus on core subjects sometimes make it difficult to attain this goal. Further research on the impact of such effects is needed.

### **Incorporating the Structure of Art Rooms in Academic Classrooms**

This study has revealed that the art room environment has left an impact on the informants contributing data in response to questions focusing on classroom structure. The difference between art room and regular class room environments is remarkable. This is due to the open and trusting atmosphere and a higher degree of self-direction within the art room.

Informants stated that they were able to seek out solutions to creative problems they had encountered while building artistic and social skills. Are the subjects of science and English so different that a similar environment be put into place in order to facilitate student empowerment? More than one informant stated that English classes had provided memorable learning experiences due to structured freedom, the ability to choose personal content within the class guidelines.

Core subjects share an explorative nature often associated with visual art. This researcher has noticed that tessellation and M.C. Escher prints are found in many middle and high school math classes, no doubt hoping to spark an interest in the artistic principals of pattern that math and art share. Perhaps the unstructured environment which some core teachers perceive in art rooms is due to the differentiation in instruction taking place there that they may be reluctant to initiate. The discovery of why instructors in core subject fail to emulate more creative and visually stimulating environments within their classroom may be a viable path for future research.

### **Maintaining the Role of Artist While Working as an Art Teacher**

In the perception of this researcher, there is a sense of diminished artistic production that occurs when one enters the teaching profession. This may be related to educational trends and curricular constraints. Perhaps it is because personal time to achieve flow experiences regarding creative output is curtailed. Over time, this may contribute to an increasing lack of motivation to provide fresh and stimulating experiences for students in the classes of these instructors. This might not be the case for some instructors who continually maintain a balance between the two demanding careers. Future studies might reveal the strategies that enable instructors who have achieved equilibrium between instruction and

creative production. Research to determine the impact of a diminished view as a producing artist and the relation to art instruction may have implications to the future of artistic maintenance among art instructors.

### **The Role of Instructional Leaders**

The findings provided by this study indicate a direction for instructional leaders hoping to promote visual artistic achievement. In addition, it has been shown that a substantial impact on learning in core subjects is evident through a solid arts curriculum. Since this inquiry has established the high school level as the starting point for mature artistic emergence (Lowenfeld, 1987), important links between visual arts education and high school students should be pointed out.

According to the High School Transcript Study report (National Art Education Association, 1998), 52.7% of high school graduates had earned credit in visual arts courses. Interestingly, 66% of Native American graduates, and 63% of Hispanic graduates had earned credit in visual arts courses. Both of these groups are considered to have home environments where extended families may be influential in promoting visual arts as a cultural treasure. This was an important issue brought out by both Csikszentmihalyi (1995) and Robinson (2008).

The College Board had shown that SAT scores for visual arts studio and design course students were affected as well (Profile of College-Bound Seniors National Report for 2000, 2001, and 2002). Mean verbal SAT scores for those years were 50 points higher than those from students not involved in the visual arts. Mean math SAT scores for the same span of time were 34 points higher than non-visual art students. In light of the more current financial difficulties, consideration for the arts have been undergoing a downward trend, no doubt affecting these numbers.

In general, all of the arts- visual art, music, drama, and dance- have a beneficial impact on education that cannot be lost because of current conditions. Besides allowing learners to express themselves creatively, the arts present opportunities to teach tolerance and openness. The arts promote individuality and self-confidence that can improve overall academic performance. They help students to develop a sense of goal-setting skills and craftsmanship that can influence their lives beyond school. This researcher has seen first-hand the impact visual art has had on troubled youth in his class, with students gaining an improved attitude towards school in general.

Instructional leaders involved in visual art may very well find themselves at a point where education becomes increasingly local rather than global. The greater community as a whole can have a stake in the educational process. Music has had a head start in community involvement because of the coordinated effort of many students in performance. Visual art can reap the same benefits by showcasing artists' works in public spaces and events.

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## Appendix A: Consent to Participate in Research

## Consent to Participate in Research

### Study Title

Revelations: A Qualitative Study on Visual Artistic Emergence  
Common Triggers, Shared Perceptions and Strategies for Perpetuation

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Steven Kobylenski, doctoral candidate at Western Connecticut State University. The results of this study will be contributed towards a dissertation for a Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership. You have been selected for this study because of your background in the visual arts, and your personal passion in pursuing further experiences and knowledge pertaining to it.

### Purpose of the Study

This study will attempt to deepen understanding about when someone decides to become involved in visual art. As the title suggests, the information you and others supply will determine whether there are certain things that you've experienced that are common to the group. The point in your life that your awareness in the visual arts began to move you toward that path can be useful in developing better educational practices in the future.

### Procedures

This study will be based on the accumulated individual descriptions of a small group of individuals, each deeply involved in the field of visual art. Through a series of interviews, information will be coded and assessed in order to determine what common bond the group shares. The interviews will be mutually agreed upon regarding timing and duration, during the 2007 calendar year. The information will be presented in the dissertation, tentatively scheduled to be completed by May of 2008.

### Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and you are free to become involved or not. Should you decide to be in the study, you may withdraw at any time without consequence or penalty. The researcher may withdraw you at any time during the study if circumstances warrant doing so.

### Confidentiality

Any information that is shared with the researcher during this study will remain confidential. The coding of the information that is acquired during the interviewing process is an important step in this process. Any audio recording of the interviews taking place during the duration of the research can be reviewed or edited by you at any point during the study. All audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the study.

### Potential Risks, Discomforts and Benefits

You should be unaffected by any risks or discomforts during this study. You may exercise your right to withdraw should the study become pose a problem for any reason. You will not receive payment for your participation in this study. Your contribution has the potential to positively affect the future of art education.

Signature of Research Subject

I understand the scope of the study above and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form for my records.

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Name of subject (Print)

Date

---

Name of Legal Representative (Print)

Date

---

Signature of Subject or Legal Representative

Date

Signature of Investigator

In my opinion, the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent to participate in this study.

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

## Appendix B: School and District Letter of Agreement

Steven Kobylenski

Art Instructor

Naugatuck School District

Naugatuck, Connecticut

I am a Doctoral Candidate at Western Connecticut State University, Department of Education and Educational Psychology, working in the Instructional Leadership Program. I am seeking your permission in a study for a research dissertation. This study will attempt to deepen understanding about when individuals decide to become involved in visual art, and will be based on the accumulated individual descriptions of a small group of individuals, each deeply involved in the field of visual art. Though a series of interviews, information will be coded and assessed in order to determine what common bonds the group shares and will take place during the 2007-2008 calendar years.

Upon deciding to give permission to conduct this research, please sign and return this letter of consent. If you have further questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me, my Primary Advisor Dr. Thomas Cordy, or Dr. Marcy Delcourt, Program Director of the Doctorate Cohort with whom I am involved at contacts listed below. This research proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Western Connecticut State University. Thank you for considering this request.

Steven Kobylenski  
[kobylenski@sbcglobal.net](mailto:kobylenski@sbcglobal.net)  
(203)xxx.xxxx

Dr. Thomas Cordy  
[cordyt@wcsu.edu](mailto:cordyt@wcsu.edu)  
(203)837.8520

Dr. Marcy Delcourt  
[delcourt@wcsu.edu](mailto:delcourt@wcsu.edu)  
(203)837.9121

## Appendix C: Letter of Consent



Steven Kobylenski

Art Instructor

Naugatuck School District

Naugatuck, Ct

Dear (**Subject's Name**),

I am a Doctoral Candidate at Western Connecticut State University, Department of Education and Educational Psychology, working in the Instructional Leadership Program. I am seeking your participation in a study for a research dissertation. You have been selected for this study because of your background in the visual arts, and your personal passion in pursuing further experiences and knowledge pertaining to it. This study will attempt to deepen understanding about when individuals decide to become involved in visual art. The point in your life that your awareness in the visual arts began to move you toward that path can be useful in developing better educational practices in the future.

This study will be based on the accumulated individual descriptions of a small group of individuals, each deeply involved in the field of visual art. Students must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this inquiry. Though a series of interviews, information will be coded and assessed in order to determine what common bonds the group shares. The interviews will be mutually agreed upon regarding timing and duration, during the 2007 calendar year. The information will be presented in the dissertation, tentatively scheduled to be completed by May of 2008. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and you are free to become involved or not. Should you decide to be in the study, you may withdraw at any time without consequence or penalty. I may respectfully withdraw you at any time during the study if circumstances warrant doing so.

Any information that is shared between us during this study will remain confidential. The coding of the information that is acquired during the interviewing process is an important step in ensuring confidentiality. Participants will not be identified by name. Any audio recording of the interviews taking place during the duration of the research can be reviewed or edited by you at any point during the study. All audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the study. You should be unaffected by any risks or discomforts during this study. You may exercise your right to withdraw should the study become pose a problem for any reason. You will not receive payment for your participation in this study. Your contribution has the potential to positively affect the future of art education.

Upon deciding to give permission to conduct this research, please sign and return this letter of consent. If you have further questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me, my Primary Advisor Dr. Thomas Cordy, or Dr. Marcy Delcourt, Program Director of the Ed.D. Cohort with whom I am involved at contacts listed below. This research proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Western Connecticut State University. Thank you for considering this request.

Steven Kobylenski

Dr. Thomas Cordy

Dr Marcy Delcourt

[kobylenski@sbcglobal.net](mailto:kobylenski@sbcglobal.net)

[cordyt@wcsu.edu](mailto:cordyt@wcsu.edu)

[delcourt@wcsu.edu](mailto:delcourt@wcsu.edu)

(203)xxx.xxxx

(203)837.8520

(203)837.9121

Thank You.

Steven Kobylenski

## Appendix D: Informant Nomination Form

## Informant Nomination Form

Steven Kobylenski

Art Instructor

Naugatuck School District

Naugatuck, Ct

I am a Doctoral Candidate at Western Connecticut State University, Department of Education and Educational Psychology, working in the Instructional Leadership Program. I am seeking your assistance in a study for a research dissertation. This study will attempt to deepen understanding about when individuals decide to become involved in visual art, and will be based on the accumulated individual descriptions collected from a selected group of students 18 years of age or older, each deeply involved in the field of visual art. Though a series of informal interviews, responses and information will be coded and assessed in order to determine what common bonds the group may share and will take place during the 2007-2008 calendar years. Any information that is shared during this study will remain strictly confidential. No students will be identified by name.

In order for the study to be successful, you would need to provide the names of 5 students of either gender involved in your visual arts program who have displayed proficiency with any media within this field. A General Criteria sheet provided will assist you in the selection process.

Those with a history of artistic involvement dating back to the middle school level would be able to provide the information that may prove valuable to this inquiry. Selected students would be contacted and interviews would be scheduled at their convenience.

Please have prospective participants complete the brief Subject Identification Sheet provided and return it using the supplied envelope. If you have further questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me, my Primary Advisor Dr. Thomas Cordy, or Dr. Marcy Delcourt, Program Director of the Ed.D. Cohort with whom I am involved at contacts listed below. This research proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Western Connecticut State University.

Thank you for considering this request.

Steven Kobylenski	Dr. Thomas Cordy	Dr Marcy Delcourt
<a href="mailto:kobylenski@sbcglobal.net">kobylenski@sbcglobal.net</a>	<a href="mailto:cordyt@wcsu.edu">cordyt@wcsu.edu</a>	<a href="mailto:delcourt@wcsu.edu">delcourt@wcsu.edu</a>
(203)xxx.xxxx	(203)837.8520	(203)837.9121

## General Criteria for Student Selection

### All students

- Must be 18 years or older
- Have been involved in the field of visual art since their middle school years
- Show a self-directed drive in field of visual art

### Advanced Placement (AP) high school students

- Working toward or have completed Advanced Placement portfolio
- Actively creating personal artwork in any media
- Planning on pursuing art-related course of study at college level

### Undergraduate students

- Actively creating artwork in any visual art medium
- Planning an advanced degree or artistic continuance

### Master of Fine Arts students

- Planning artistic continuance

ID # \_\_\_\_\_

### Art Assessment Sheet

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Interest in visual art since \_\_\_\_\_ grade. Present Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_

Medium/Media of choice \_\_\_\_\_

Brief description of body of work

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Category	Proficient	Advanced	Exemplary
Concepts Utilizes unique viewpoint when developing projects.			
Process Exhibits focus and completes projects			
Product Work exhibits care and craftsmanship.			

## Appendix E: Minor Consent Form



Steven Kobylenski

Art Instructor

Naugatuck High School

Naugatuck, Ct

I am a Doctoral Candidate at Western Connecticut State University, Department of Education and Educational Psychology, working in the Instructional Leadership Program. I am seeking your participation in a study for a research dissertation. You have been selected for this study because of your background in the visual arts, and your personal passion in pursuing further experiences and knowledge pertaining to it. This study will attempt to deepen understanding about when individuals decide to become involved in visual art. The point in your life that your awareness in the visual arts began to move you toward that path can be useful in developing better educational practices in the future.

This study will be based on the accumulated individual descriptions of a small group of individuals, each deeply involved in the field of visual art. Students must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this inquiry. Though a series of interviews, information will be coded and assessed in order to determine what common bonds the group shares. The interviews will be mutually agreed upon regarding timing and duration, during the 2007 calendar year. The information will be presented in the dissertation, tentatively scheduled to be completed by May of 2008. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and you are free to become involved or not. Should you decide to be in the study, you may withdraw at any time without consequence or penalty. I may respectfully withdraw you at any time during the study if circumstances warrant doing so.

Any information that is shared between us during this study will remain confidential. The coding of the information that is acquired during the interviewing process is an important step in ensuring confidentiality. Participants will not be identified by name. Any audio recording of the interviews taking place during the duration of the research can be reviewed or edited by you at any point during the study. All audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the study. You should be unaffected by any risks or discomforts during this study. You may exercise your right to withdraw should the study become pose a problem for any reason. You will not receive payment for your participation in this study. Your contribution has the potential to positively affect the future of art education.

Upon deciding to give permission to conduct this research, please sign and return this letter of consent. If you have further questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me, my Primary Advisor Dr. Thomas Cordy, or Dr. Marcy Delcourt, Program Director of the Ed.D. Cohort with whom I am involved at contacts listed below. This research proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Western Connecticut State University. Thank you for considering this request.

Steven Kobylenski

Dr. Thomas Cordy

Dr Marcy Delcourt

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[cordyt@wcsu.edu](mailto:cordyt@wcsu.edu)

[delcourt@wcsu.edu](mailto:delcourt@wcsu.edu)

(203)xxx.xxxx

(203)837.8520

(203)837.9121

Thank You.

Steven Kobylenski

ID# \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Research Subject

I understand the scope of the study above and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form for my records.

---

Name of subject (Print)

Date

---

Name of Legal Representative (Print)

Date

---

Signature of Subject or Legal Representative

Date

Signature of Investigator

In my opinion, the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent to participate in this study.

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

## Appendix F: Interview Questions Sheet

### Questions Directing Inquiry

- A. What triggers artistic emergence?
- B. When does artistic emergence generally occur?
- C. What are the relationships between school experience and artistic emergence?
- D. What considerations must be present for perpetuation of this passion?

### *Interview Questions*

#### *Descriptive Questions*

- 1. I'd like for you to imagine sitting in the room you had as a child. Can you look around and describe how it is decorated? (A,B)
- 2. Can you describe the first piece of art that you remember? (A,B,C)
- 3. Tell me about the people in your family with what you would call an artistic talent? (A,D)
- 4. Who was the first art teacher you remember? If you were this teacher, how do you think they would remember you in class? (A,B,C)
- 5. Can you describe what happens in a typical art class? (A,B,C)
- 6. Do you recall when you started to take an interest in personal choices in decorating your room or picking your own clothing? (A,B)

#### *Structural Questions*

- 1. How did your art period differ from other periods in your school day? (A,B,C)
- 2. What did your inclusion in an art period mean to you? (A,B,C)
- 3. Were you ever recognized in any way for artwork that you created? (C,D)

4. Did your parents (caregiver) enable and support your personal choices in decorating, clothing or artistic style? (A,B)
5. Can you recall how you dealt with a particularly negative experience during an art period? (C,D)
6. Who were some of the artists that influenced you? (A,B,C,D)

*Contrast Questions*

1. Can you tell me about differences in the atmosphere in regular classes compared with art classes? (A,B,C)
2. If you were your parent (caregiver), what type of artwork would you save for your child? (A,B,D)
3. How were conversations with friends involved in visual art different than those with friends who were not? (A,B,D)
4. Were there any differences in your interactions with your art instructors and those of other instructors you had? (C,D)

Eliminate these returns and use page break so that the text will begin on a new page no matter what computer is used. Center all appendix names.

## Appendix G: Preliminary and Axial Codes

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## Analysis of Data

### Primary and Axial Coding

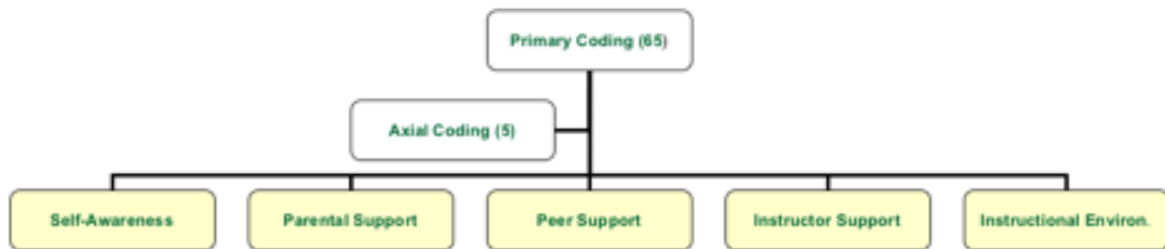
- Primary coding included 65 categories encompassing a broad range of categories establishing a baseline for visual artistic emergence.
  - Primary codes were combined and collapsed to establish axial code list used in the inquiry. The categories were established by determining the frequencies of the early code clusters.
  - Axial codes comprised five central categories that fit the importance of the inquiry: Self Awareness; Parental Support; Peer Interactions and Support; Instructor Support and Guidance; and Instructional Environment.
-



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## Research Questions and Coding Hierarchy

The Generation of the Five Axial Codes  
All coding is related to the research questions.



Appendix H: Comparison of Paigetian Stages and  
Lowenfeld's Stages of Artistic Development

## Comparison of Piagetian Stages and Lowenfeld's Stages of Artistic Development

Piagetian Stages of Cognitive Development	Lowenfeld's Stages of Artistic Growth
Sensory-Motor Period (Lasting until 2 years old)	Scribbling Stage (2 to 4 years)
Preoperational Period (Lasting until 7 years old)	Pre-Schematic Stage (4 to 7 years old)
Concrete Operations (Lasting from 7 to 11 years old)	Schematic Stage (7 to 9 years old)
Formal operations (Beginning at 11 or 12 years old)	Gang Stage (9 to 12 years old)
	Adolescence and Self-Identification (About 12 to 18 years old)